

Unless you've had your head buried in the sand for the last few months you are aware (perhaps painfully so) that the political season is in full swing. You can't turn on a radio or news station without hearing sound bites from debates, stump speeches, and town halls. The primaries have begun and each candidate wants to convince you that they should be the next president.

One of the hot button issues that people are listening closely for again this year is immigration. What should be done with the millions of illegal immigrants that are already in the country, and what should America's policy on immigration be for the future?

Now, I don't consider myself a very political person, but I do love history, and the historian in me realizes that this generation of Americans isn't the only generation to face an immigration "problem" – in fact, it's kind of been going on from the very beginning.

You see, from long before America was even an independent nation, America (the land of opportunity) has drawn immigrants from all over the world. People saw, and still see in America a place where a better life is obtainable. So, coming to America and becoming an American citizen has been a hope and a dream that is by no means unique to this generation.

I think that's a good reminder for all of us (especially those of us who were born here) – do you realize what a blessing it is to be an American citizen? Being and American citizen is something to be proud of, something to be thankful for. The safety, security, opportunity, and comfort we enjoy because we are American citizens is an amazing blessing.

Being a citizen of a powerful and successful country an enormous blessing that shouldn't be taken lightly - we understand that from experience. So did the Philippians.

The people living in the city of Philippi, to whom Paul was writing, knew what a blessing citizenship was. They were, after all, a colony of Rome. The status of "colony of Rome" wasn't something Rome handed out lightly or all that often. Being a colony of Rome meant that even though the city of Philippi was in Macedonia, it was considered Italian soil. The people born there were considered born in Italy, and therefore were Roman citizens.

And being a Roman citizen was a big deal. Being a Roman citizen meant you got to enjoy all the safety, security, opportunity, and comfort that Rome had to offer. Much like the American Dream, being a Roman citizen was the hope and dream of countless people.

And you better believe the Philippians knew what a blessing it was to have that citizenship by birth. If you think folks have to jump through hoops to become American citizens, that doesn't hold a candle to what it took to become a Roman citizen. Unless you were born into it or you were part of the "1%" and could buy citizenship (an extremely expensive proposition), you really only had two choices if you wanted to be a Roman citizen. You could be granted it by doing some huge and heroic service for the empire, or you could earn it by serving 25 years in a Roman legion, out on the front

lines, fighting for and protecting the empire you hope you survive long enough to become a citizen of.

So, the Philippians knew what a blessing it was to be born in a colony of Rome, to be considered full-fledged citizens. Which is why Paul used the language he did in Philippians 3. And as American citizens, it's language we should be able to understand as well.

Paul says to the Philippians (and us), **"Our citizenship is in heaven."**

Let that phrase sink in for just a minute this morning. Better yet, you would do well to let that phrase sink in for the rest of this week... In fact, you could spend the rest of your life unpacking that phrase, and it would be a life well spent.

Our citizenship is in heaven.

We are citizens of heaven.

Which means, just like being an American or Roman citizen means you are beneficiaries of everything that America or Rome has to offer, as a citizen of heaven, you are a beneficiary of everything that heaven has to offer.

Paul lays out a few of those benefits, right? **"Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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."**

You have been taken and washed clean in the blood of the Lamb, our Savior, Jesus Christ. You have been made a citizen of the greatest kingdom that ever has, or ever will exist. You have been made an heir of eternal life in heaven – a place where there will be no more sorrow, no more pain, no more suffering - everything that is wrong with this world and wrong with your life will never be able to touch you again; where God himself will wipe every tear from your eyes; where that failing body of yours, which the older you get fails you more and more, will be transformed – changed from imperfect and decaying to perfect and eternal, just like Jesus.

We are citizens of heaven. That simple truth has infinite and unspeakably amazing implications for our lives now and forever in heaven.

But there's a problem with this citizenship, isn't there? Not so much a problem with the citizenship, more so a problem with us.

This is the second Sunday in Lent. Every year, around this time, Christians spend 40 days following Jesus, our Savior, to his cross. One of the defining themes of Lent is repentance. Lent is a time to take a good hard look in the mirror to see just what it is about us that made Jesus have to go to that cross in the first place.

And when it comes to this idea, this truth, that we are citizens of heaven, all of us have a good deal of soul-searching to do. Some repentance needs to happen.

In Philippians, Paul contrasts living as a citizen of heaven with a different kind of living.

Paul points out what we all know (what Jesus pointed out in the Gospel, and what Jeremiah learned by experience): there are people who live as citizens of heaven, and then there are people who live as enemies of heaven.

There are people who live as citizens of heaven, and there are people who live, primarily as citizens of this sinful world. Paul points out two things that exemplify the group of people living as enemies of heaven: first, **their god is their stomach**. Second, **their glory is in their shame**... in case you were wondering, now is the time to start looking in that mirror...

People who are enemies of heaven (citizens of this world) are interested in one thing, and one thing only – worshiping themselves. They desire to have full stomachs, nice houses, fast cars, big TVs, healthy bodies, successful careers, meaningful friendships, and they will sacrifice just about anything to obtain those things.

They don't see the need to give over and above what is comfortable in offerings to a church when they could just spend a good portion of that money on worshiping their stomachs.

They don't see the need to spend time reading the Bible every day, having devotions with their families, coming to church every week, sticking around for Bible class, volunteering more than just an hour a week to a congregation because they would rather spend that time worshiping their stomachs – making sure that life here and now is comfortable.

People who are citizens of this world worship their stomachs as god... are you ever guilty of that?

They worship their stomachs and they glory in their shame... what does that mean?

Well, the simple fact is, the same people who are proud of what they have accomplished in this world, finding pride and glory in their careers and their bank accounts and their homes and their clothes and their health and their kids, will one day stand in front of the throne of God where those false gods they worshiped on this earth, those things that brought them glory and pride here and now, will be objects of shame and ridicule and condemnation at the final judgement.

Friends, it's time for some good soul searching. Are you living as a citizen of heaven? Or are you living as a citizen of this world? Paul makes no bones about it, those who are living as citizens of this world **are living as enemies of the cross of Christ**.

“That's not me, right? I'm not an enemy of the cross of Christ!”

We may not consider ourselves enemies of the cross of Christ (and please understand, I'm not saying we are enemies of Christ), **BUT**, I know for a fact from my own life, from looking in my mirror, that way more often than I would care to admit, my life, my actions, my thoughts, my desires reflect more like a citizen of this world than a citizen of heaven. When I look at myself in the mirror, I'm ashamed to say I see a person who spends way more time than I should making myself happy, filling my stomach.

And for that I need to repent. I am sorry that parts of my life are more focused on filling my stomach rather than **eagerly awaiting a Savior from heaven**.

I also know for a fact that each and every one of you see that same sinner staring back at you from the mirror every morning. I know for a fact that none of you are perfect, not even close, which means that all of you in some way right now, in the past

week have, and in the coming week will worship that false god called “stomach” – putting your wants, wishes, and perceived needs above and ahead of what God wants from you.

And for that you need to repent. You need to say you are sorry and ask God to forgive you. I know that for a fact.

But, do you know what else I know for a fact? Even though I don't deserve it, even though I don't live like it nearly as often or as perfectly as I should, I'm still a citizen of heaven... and so are you... because Lent is not only a time of repentance, it's also a time when we remember with solemn rejoicing that a Savior *did* come from heaven. He lived his life always worshiping his Father over his stomach, perfectly, all the time. And then he took your failures (and mine) to live as citizens of heaven on his shoulders to his cross – we see him resolutely going toward that cross in the Gospel. He knew what was coming and yet he willingly goes.

He lived for you. He died for you. And then he rose again to guarantee you that even though you don't deserve it, that life and that death count for you, they saved you, they have made you citizens of heaven. And with that blood bought citizenship comes all those benefits of heaven. They are yours, never to be taken away even though each day we prove again how little we deserve them.

Are you beginning to see why this phrase, this truth, that we are citizens of heaven, is worth dwelling on today, tomorrow, and the rest of your life?

Today when you are driving home and you're grumbling about how cold it is (how nice it would be if spring came and stuck around), and your car isn't as nice as some of the cars you drive by, and your house isn't as big as some of those you pass, and that other car cuts you off, and makes you slam on your breaks, none of that matters... Why? Because you're but a stranger here, you are a citizen of heaven. Your life isn't all about being comfortable now, your life is one spent eagerly awaiting your Savior to come again and make you comfortable forever in your real home, heaven.

Tomorrow when you wake up and you feel every joint aching as you roll out of bed, when you reflect on how weak and frail you are compared to what you used to be, when you would rather just stay in bed and ignore the daunting realities of your life – the loneliness, the stress, the pressure to measure up to your standards and the standards of those around you – when those bills keep coming, when the hectic pace of parenting threatens to overwhelm, when the stress of being a kid in school – trying to make friends, and fit in, and figure out what should do with your life – won't go away, you can smile because none of those stresses really matter... Why don't they matter? Because you're but a stranger here, you are a citizen of heaven. The stresses of today are nothing compared to the glorious riches you have waiting for you tomorrow, and forever in heaven.

**“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way!”** Remember, you are citizens of heaven. The same Savior who came once give you that citizenship will come again to take you there.

Amen.