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Philippians 3:17-4:1

My fellow citizens of heaven,

What does your citizenship mean to you? How does it affect the way you carry yourself through life? Does the way you live reflect what that citizenship means to you? In what ways do you reflect your citizenship? Before I go any further, I want to clarify that I'm not talking about your citizenship here in the US or any other country of which you are a citizen. Nor am I talking about a state or city citizenship. Yes, our earthly citizenship is certainly something to be thankful for and something that we should not take for granted. But today we are going to be talking about our heavenly citizenship. In our lesson we will see that we are to **live as citizens of heaven. Paul will show us how, and Jesus will show us why.**

Citizenship was very important to the people Philippi. At the time of this writing, the city of Philippi was a very prominent Roman colony. This place had a thriving community and a large population of war veterans living there. The people who lived in this city were proud of their Roman heritage, of their Roman citizenship. In Acts 16, we see how the Romans were very proud of their Roman rules and religion and used those rules to throw Paul and Silas into prison. But by God's grace, his gospel flourished in the city. The congregation was growing and doing well. However, Paul was concerned for them. Throughout his letter he encourages the Philippians to live in harmony and humility under Christ. He encourages the congregation to stand firm in their faith, while they live among a people who do not live the same way they do.

This is why Paul tells them in the first verse of our lesson for today, **“Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.”** The Philippians saw and learned how Paul conducted himself as a Christian. They saw the way he talked, the way he acted, and the way he carried out his faith life. But Paul is not saying that he is the ultimate example or that the people need to imitate him because he is such a great Christian. Paul uses himself as an example only because his example reflects Christ's example, the perfect example. In chapter 2, Paul had just given a long laundry list of ways that the Philippians could serve in humility. That humility was based on the example that Christ had set for all Christians. Paul is also not saying that he is the only one who can model Christ. The Philippians have their own to imitate as well. Christians can and should look to one another and encourage each other by the way they are living. The Philippians had strong members who followed Christ's example were being examples themselves.

Paul encourages the Philippians to imitate these good examples, because as we see in the next two verses, there are bad examples that surround them. **“For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.”** The Philippians had a lot to watch out for. Not only did they have to worry about the outside world, those who didn't care to know God, wanting nothing to do with him, they also had to worry about these nominal Christians. Paul had warned the Philippians of these people before. In fact, Paul is mourning over those who are claiming to be

Christian but living quite the opposite. He even calls these people “enemies of the cross of Christ.” These people were not living as Christians dedicated to Christ. They were dedicated to their own personal desires. They thought they could get away with whatever they wanted because they claimed to be Christians. We see the same situation in our Old Testament lesson. The people Jeremiah came to rebuke on behalf of the LORD, did not want to hear it. They thought that because they were within the city of Jerusalem, they were safe. They didn’t have to follow the command of God. These people are only concerned with earthly things. But Paul tells us their destiny is destruction. The road that they are on will only lead to eternal punishment in hell.

But as for the faithful Philippian Christians, Paul says, their citizenship is in heaven. They have the inheritance of eternal life that was won for them through the suffering, death, and resurrection of their Lord, Jesus Christ. Because of this amazing love that has been shown them, Paul calls them to imitate the examples that they have. Out of thanks for what Christ has done for them, the Philippians should live lives that reflect that citizenship and what that citizenship means to them.

Picture it this way. Paul encourages his people to be what you might call, “model citizens.” What do think of when you hear model citizen? Probably someone who does their taxes faithfully and on time, votes even at the local level, goes to city council meetings, is involved with his community, takes care of his house, etc. This person considers the rights and privileges of a citizen important. Likewise, Paul encourages the Philippians to think of their heavenly citizenship in the same way. He would even want them to take this citizenship far more serious than they considered their earthly, Roman citizenship.

And if Paul were alive today, he would want to share this encouragement with us as well. And he shows us how to live as citizens of heaven. Our situation is so very similar to the Philippians. We live in a nation many consider now to be a post-Christian society. The common morality of people is greatly opposed to what God has established in the Word. Even more similar is that we have to be on the lookout for nominal Christians, those who say they follow Christ, but really follow their own sinful desires. Christians who think that because Jesus has saved them from their sins, they can do whatever they want with no fear of consequence. They think biblical morality out-of-date, unnecessary for Christians living in a modern, progressive society. So they pursue what they think is right, instead of what God has stated to be right. These thoughts and ideas can seem very tempting to us. They sound good, right even. But don’t be fooled. This is the path that leads to destruction.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, **live as citizens of heaven** as Paul encouraged your ancient brothers and sisters in Philippi, look to your examples. Whether they be the pastors, the teachers in your school, your parents, your friends in the congregation, or your elders. Most importantly look to the example that Christ, your Savior has set for you. Strive to imitate those examples and even strive to be an example yourself. What does that look like? How do you lead by example? Well, what does God’s Word say? Build others up. Go to church and Bible study, be there for your friend in the rough times, welcome that friend who hasn’t been in church for a long time and tell them how happy you are to see him. Be avid in your personal devotional life. Steer

yourself and others away from speaking negatively about others. Live a life that reflects that Christ has made you a citizen of heaven and how much that means to you.

Remember that without him, we would be in the same state as those nominal Christians. Without the saving work of Christ, we would not be citizens of heaven. We would be aliens, foreigners, people outside the walls of the kingdom of God, unable to enter the gates and be a part of its people. We would be people whose destiny is that of destruction, eternal punishment in hell. But Christ won that citizenship for us, the Holy Spirit sealed us as citizens of heaven in baptism. Because of that citizenship won for us, we live a life of thanks. We've been shown **how** through the examples we have.

It can seem like a daunting task to do this. Without something to look forward to, without a **why**, it could be impossible to do the how. Paul lays out the why to the Philippians. **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.** Paul reminds the Philippians that Christ is coming again. And when he does come, he will transform the bodies of believers into something glorious, bodies that are perfect like Christ. While on this earth we have to deal with a weak, sinful, and corrupt body. We get sick, we feel physical pain, we feel emotional pain, we become weak, we mess up, we sin, and we die. But by Christ we will be raised with perfect bodies that don't get sick, that don't hurt, that don't sin, that never perish.

How is that possible? Christ. He has the power to bring everything under his control: authorities, angels, demons, rulers, death and life. He has the power to control all of it. He will use that power of his to transform you and me into perfect beings like him. And this perfection is ours forever, it is never going to end. Christ is going to bring us to where we belong as citizens.

But we're going to have to wait for this to happen. And while we wait, there is going to be the temptation to take that fact for granted, to take our citizenship for granted. I can't tell you how many times I hear that little voice in me. Telling me that its ok to sin: to talk bad about this friend of mine, to ignore that favor my wife asked me to do, to straight up not do the task for my school or my job. It says that its ok because I'm forgiven, it doesn't matter that I sin because I am a citizen of heaven and that gives me license to do what I want. I don't know what that little voice in your head has been telling you lately, but I can guess that it's along the same lines as what mine tells me. That part of us is our old man, our sinful nature, trying to pull us away from what God wants. It wants nothing to do with God. It doesn't want to obey his rules, it doesn't want to read his word, and it doesn't want to be a citizen of his kingdom. Instead, it would prefer to be a denizen of destruction. And that is what our sinful natures deserve. That sinful nature is absent of anything good and anything worthy that would make it a citizen of heaven. That sinful nature in us should make us eternal denizens of destruction. But that's not who we are. That's not how God wanted to leave us. In our gospel lesson you heard how Jesus pined for the people of Jerusalem. He called out to it, wanting nothing more than to gather those people to himself. He wanted them to be citizens of his kingdom. He wants all people to come to him and be a part of his kingdom. That's why he lived, suffered, and died for you. Your Savior wants nothing more

than for you to be a part of his heavenly citizenship forever. He redeemed you, set you free from the slavery of sin, and you were made to be a citizen of his eternal kingdom.

Now he empowers you to live as a citizen of heaven. He gives you the strength to imitate the example that you see in the apostle Paul, in those around you, and especially in Christ. He gives you the strength to be that example yourself. As you walk your life as a citizen of heaven, your Savior is walking right alongside you. He's there to help lead you through the temptations. He's there to bring you through the dark days of your life. He's there to lean on in times of trouble, and he's there rejoicing with you throughout the many good days and blessings of your life. That Savior is coming again, and he is going to transform you and me into something perfect forever. Knowing all this we follow the commands that our LORD has set for us. We do it out of love and thanks for what our Savior has done, and for what he is going to come and do. As we wait, keep the last verse of our reading as a reminder as you live that life of a citizen of heaven: **“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends.”** Living as a citizen of heaven can be difficult. No one said it was going to be easy. The wait is a long one. But the wait is so very worth it. **Live as a citizen of heaven, because you know why.**

As you wait for our Savior to come again, stand firm as Paul encouraged the Philippians. Stand firm in your faith and stand firm in your life as a Christian. Let your life reflect just how important those things are. In your life, let it be evident where your citizenship belongs. As Paul showed us how, and as Jesus showed us why, **live as citizens of heaven.** Amen.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.