**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 10-15-2023**

**Citizens of Heaven**

For a number of years now, there has been significant debate within America on what is the right path for citizenship. Certainly, for most people, the pathway is birth. They are born as American citizens. This was probably most, if not all, of us that are here today. And of course, there are those that are not born as American citizens, but then become citizens at a later date, as their citizenship is granted or awarded to them. Now how and when this is granted or not granted is something that people disagree on.

But nearly everyone agrees that American citizenship is important and matters a lot. Years ago, Kara’s parents adopted 5 children from Russia. And citizenship was a very big deal for her family. In fact, I remember Kara telling me about when a special assembly was held at their elementary school to celebrate her siblings being granted American citizenship.

Interestingly, these five brothers or sisters-in-law of mine are now considered dual citizens. That is how it works with Russia as well as some other countries. They do not lose their Russia citizenship, but instead are considered citizens both of Russia as well as America. Dual citizens.

Keep this in mind as we now turn our thoughts towards the Christians in Philippi. In the 1st century, it was Roman citizenship that was a very big deal. Remember, Philippi was intentionally built up as a Roman colony. The privileges of being a citizen there were considered very important. There would be higher status and also protection from certain punishments.

And people would pride themselves in being Roman citizens in a similar way to how Americans appreciate the benefits of being American citizens.

I can’t help but think of that powerful song, *God Bless the USA*. “Well I’m proud to be an American. Where at least I know I’m free. And I won’t forget the men who died and gave that right to me. And I’ll gladly stand up next to them and defend her still today. Cause there ain’t no doubt I love this land. God bless the U.S.A.”

That’s a powerful song. But something similar would have been what the Philippian would have felt towards their identity as Roman citizens.

I invite you to now turn with me to Philippians 3:18-4:1

**18 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.** **19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set 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 and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!**

Paul is informing these Christians in Philippi that their ultimate and truest and most important citizenship is in heaven. In other words, far more important than their Roman citizenship was their heavenly citizenship in God’s kingdom.

Now Roman citizenship was something that was obtained in a few different ways. For many, it was granted them at birth, based on the status of their parents. For others, citizenship would be awarded after paying a large sum of money or doing some noteworthy deed.

But heavenly citizenship is given in a very different way. It is granted not based on the status of one’s parents nor is it something that can be purchased with money or good deeds. Rather, it is given by God Himself to everyone that puts that faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

How beautiful is that? All the rights and privileges of being a citizen of the Kingdom of heaven are given freedom by God’s grace. It is as people surrender their lives into the hands of the savior of the world and turn away from living for themselves that God declares heavenly citizenship to someone.

These Philippians in Philippi had said yes to Jesus and they had become citizens of heaven. The moment someone from Philippi, or anywhere for that matter, responds to Jesus in the proper way, citizenship is granted by God. And we know from other scriptures that there is a big celebration in heaven that takes place when this happens. This celebration is far bigger and more exciting than what went on for some of my siblings-in-law at that elementary school when they were grated American citizenship. There is great rejoicing and celebration in heaven the moment one sinner repents, Scripture tells us.

But while everyone was cheering and celebrating at that elementary school, not everyone on earth cheers when citizenship in heaven is granted to believers. In fact, sometimes people can become outright nasty to these citizens of heaven.

Looking at this passage, Paul tells the believers in Philippi that there are many people that live as enemies of the cross of Christ. In other words, Paul is saying that there would be many people that rejected Jesus and who would be antagonistic towards the followers of Christ.

These people oppose the cross of Christ because the cross of Christ reveals their sin and their need for God’s mercy. And generally, people do not like to admit their need and to turn from sin.

These enemies of the cross of Christ are focused on themselves. Truly, if Christ is not at the center of one’s life, the self is at the center. This person’s life becomes all about them and not about God.

Paul says that “their god is their stomach.” That is basically another way of saying that they are living for their own comfort and pleasure. They have made their stomach into a god, so to speak.

Now God is not against the stomach. He is not against people enjoying food. But the stomach and food are not to become a god to anyone. We call that gluttony.

Turning to the passage again, Paul then elaborates by saying that these enemies of the cross of Christ have ‘**their mind set on earthly things**.’ The word “set” is a strong word. To be set on something is to be very focused on it. And these enemies of the cross of Christ have chosen to set their minds, to focus their thoughts, on things merely of this world. They are just focusing on the physical and are choosing to neglect focusing on living life in a way that pleases God.

But for the Christians of Philippi, they were to think differently and act differently. Why? Verse 20 tells us. **‘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.’**

Citizenship in heaven is an eternal citizenship. For citizens of heaven, even physical death is not something to fear. For eventually even our physically bodies will be transformed to be like Jesus’ glorious body.

Additionally, Paul is telling these believers that their ultimate identity is not as Romans, but as Christians. Instead of setting their minds and focusing their thought on earthly things and having a self-focused and earthly perspective, they were to develop a heavenly perspective on everything.

This is so important. They were to learn to think Christianly about everything. And they were to see themselves as Christians above being Roman citizens.

These Christians had become dual citizens through their faith in Jesus Christ. But their primary identity was now as citizens of heaven, as Christians. This would be more important to them than their Roman citizenship. In fact, they would likely be opposed by Roman citizens that were living as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Finally, Paul says, therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

Stand firm in the Lord in this way! In what way? By knowing who you are and by knowing whose you are. You are Christians. You are God’s adopted children. You are part of His family now. That’s who you are, dear friends in Philippi! Remember this. It is by remembering this that you will be able to stand firm in the Lord.

How a about us? How are we to live out these inspired words of Paul?

**It is by remembering who we are and by remembering whose we are**? We are citizens of heaven. We become citizens of heaven through faith in Jesus Christ. It is not when we get to heaven, it is when we submit to heaven and we are brought into God’s family.

Sisters and brothers, by God’s grace we have been received as God’s children through genuinely trusting in Jesus. We are made citizens of heaven. And if you have never trusted in Jesus in this way that you have known your sins to be forgiven and that He died for you personally, today can be the day that you say yes to him.

Jesus wants everyone to be citizens in his kingdom, but He doesn’t force himself upon us. Instead, He lovingly invites us to receive him and his life.

So, what does citizenship in the kingdom of heaven look like?

Well, in America we celebrate life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We connect American citizenship to these things. And there is truth in this saying. But in some ways, citizenship in the kingdom of heaven is actually this on steroids.

True life is found in Jesus Christ alone. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

If we want to have true life, it is found in having a living and vibrant relationship with Jesus.

Life without Jesus is simply existence. It is like the walking dead. Without Jesus in our hearts and minds and God’s Spirit uniting to our spirit, we may be existing, but we are not truly living.

In America, we relate citizenship to liberty or freedom. Through Jesus Christ, citizenship in heaven is about freedom from the bondage of sin. This is our greatest enemy. Jesus died for our sins to set us free. Jesus offers us freedom from the tyranny of sin through the power of the Holy Spirit in us.

**And so citizenship in heaven is about liberty or freedom - about freedom from sin for us and for others.** In Jesus we can live in victory of the bondage of sin. And we need to thank God for this amazing freedom by Christ’s power in us.

And finally, American citizenship emphasizes pursuing happiness.

Pursing happiness through anything or anyone else but God and Jesus Christ only leads to a dead end. Only the Lord can satisfy. True happiness and joy flows out of a living relationship with God and being grateful for all that He has done for us by His grace.

[So, citizenship in heaven is about experiencing joy in Jesus and letting this joy overflow to others.](https://www.christianquotes.info/quotes-by-topic/quotes-about-happiness/#ixzz5Ieeut7db)

\*It is important to remember that every believer is a dual citizen. We have citizenship in an earthly sense from a particular nation, or even two nations, as is the same of some of my relatives. And there is nothing wrong with this.

There will be people from every nation and tribe and language that come to believe in Jesus Christ. There are still distinct nations in that sense. But ultimately, every Christian’s allegiance is to Jesus Christ above any nation or government. He and He alone is our King.

Now living out our dual-citizenship can sometimes come more easily than others. Sometimes the values and understandings and priorities of our birth citizenship and our citizenship in heaven differ. This is why the Christians in Philippi were being spoken against by some. There were different priorities, different understanding, different ultimate allegiances.

And when these citizenships clash, those that are citizens of heaven need to choose to follow God’s ways even when they are not as popular.

This is just as true today.

Finally, in this morning’s Scripture, Paul reminds the church in Philippi that Jesus will return. But he is king this day just as much as when he returns. And we are to live our lives as faithful citizens in his kingdom, both when that epitomizes what citizenship in our birth country values and when it stands in opposition to it.

And Paul teaches that Jesus is sovereign over all the nations and will bring all things under his control. And by remembering this and choosing to live as citizens of heaven, the Christians in Philippi would be strengthened in their faith.

In our rather crazy world today, we must also remember that Jesus is sovereign over everything and will bring all things under his power. We learn from the last book of God’s Word, that the things that stand in opposition to God’s Kingdom are temporary, for the kingdoms of this world will come into complete harmony with the kingdom of heaven. So in the meanwhile, we are to live as citizens of heaven each day.

We are called to make God’s kingdom known by the way that we live. Lastly, many people want to be American citizens today. May we live in such a way that others are seeing the kingdom of God in our lives and be drawn to know and love our great King – Jesus – as well.

Let us pray……….

Resources:

<https://www.bible.com/bible/111/1TI.6.18-19.NIV>