

Our Citizenship is in Heaven

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 August 2016

Preacher: Ralph Depping

[0 : 00] and 95. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty!

My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young.

A place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, they are ever praising you.

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs.

The autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God and Zion. Hear my prayer, O Lord God Almighty.

[1 : 15] Listen to me, O God of Jacob. Look upon our shield, O God. Look with favour on your anointed one. Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the Lord God is a sun and shield.

The Lord bestows favour and honour. No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. I think the last time I spoke I ended up adjusting the stand three times, so you'll forgive me if I just make sure it's all okay this time.

[2 : 21] well thank you Alex for leading this morning and thank you David as well for reading from that psalm for us well we're reaching the home stretch aren't we in our series on Philippians we've been going through it over the summer and we're now well into chapter 3 so as we're getting to the end so is Paul Paul is getting to the end of his letter to the church in Philippi and this morning he wants to share with us how we should continue to press on towards Jesus that's what he wants to share how do we continue Paul is in a Roman jail facing death and he wants to make sure that all of us all of us with heart and body and soul are facing and pulling in the right direction on the road ahead of us so let's look at chapter 3 and we're going to read from verse 12 to the end of the section so it's page 1180

Philippians chapter 3 Paul writing not that I have already obtained all this or have already been made perfect but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me brothers I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it but one thing I do forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus all of us who are mature should take such a view of things and if on some point you think differently that too God will make clear to you only let us live up to what we have already attained join with others in following my example brothers and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you for as I have often told you before and I will say again 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 on earthly things but our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await the 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 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 and as we come to the second half of chapter 3 this morning

I want to begin by giving us the big picture what is it that God through the writings of Paul wants us to really grip onto and hold onto this morning and in a way we can look at this whole section here in chapter 3 as falling between two bookends on a shelf you can picture your bookshelves and you have those nice little bookends little ornate ones and all the books in the middle and it's almost as if this section has those two kinds of bookends the first one is in verse 1 isn't it the first part of verse 1 that simple phrase finally my brothers rejoice in the Lord and that's the starting point that's the first bookend and Paul says rejoice in the Lord find your contentment and your peace in him and that's what Ken was explaining to us last week if you were here you know joy isn't just about happiness it may be happiness but it's really about having that peace and certainty and contentment in life and then if we go right to the end and actually into chapter 4 verse 1 and just the last phrase then there it says that is how you should stand firm in the Lord dear friends that is how you should stand firm in the Lord dear friends and that's like our second bookend in a sense this first bookend and second bookend and if these are the bookends of chapter 3 then we can say that this chapter is really about how you and how I are meant to rejoice and stand firm in the Lord that's the big idea that's running through this section well we want to look more closely this morning from verses 12 to the end of the chapter and within that

I think there is a very helpful centre point now I know this is all kind of beginning end centre point but I just if we can hang what's been said this morning on these things I think it will help us and that centre point between the bookends is what I want to focus on it will help us to understand what it is to rejoice in the Lord and it's going to help us to understand what it means to stand firm in the Lord it's in the form of a contrast between two ways of living and two different destinies and it comes right at the end of verse 19 their mind is on earthly things but our citizenship is in heaven their mind is on earthly things but our citizenship is in heaven dear friends we are going to see this morning what it is like to live out a heavenly citizenship a heavenly citizenship to be citizens of heaven rejoicing and standing firm in the Lord which is going to mean pressing on towards Jesus our prize and our goal and that's the summary done simple isn't it we can all head home now short sermon everyone's very happy well

I think even if we've only lived a very very short time on this earth we know that life this may be a shock for some life is not always easy no shocked faces whether we're people of faith or whether we're people of unbelief life is not always easy it's not always as simple as a phrase written down on a screen you know sometimes this phrase of you know earthly and heavenly living is plucked out isn't it I think it's probably from this section and it's used to say this Christians are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good Christians you know you can be so heavenly minded that you're of no earthly good have you heard that phrase before have you used that phrase before has that phrase been applied to you maybe well yes it's something we've heard it's something we're familiar when I think it comes from this passage the idea is that that Christians well some of them anyway or maybe even most they're kind of naive aren't they they only think about heaven they're only thinking about their own spiritual life and spiritual journey and they kind of ignore what's happening around them you know

[9 : 58] Christians are the kind of people that are too busy going to the weekend spiritual retreat instead of helping out with that family emergency too heavenly minded no earthly good but that's not actually what the text says that's not what the Bible says it's not what the scriptures say the heavenly minded and practically useless versus the earthly minded those that care for those around them and getting things done that's not what it says and see it's always a mistake to take little phrases and lift them out of the passage and make them into a little saying and say well that's what the Bible teaches or that's what it says we need to stop that and we need to take the text and take the passage and put it back into the Bible and see what it says in context and what it says as God intended it to be and what Paul intended it to be firstly and most importantly we want to see verse 18 for as I have told you before and I will say again even with tears many live as enemies of the cross of Christ this is what it means to be earthly minded in this context to be an enemy of the cross of Christ is to live in opposition to Jesus it is to be opposed to humility it is to be opposed to having a love for people how do I know that?

well if we go back to chapter 2 if you just turn back the page a very familiar passage one we've looked at already this summer and those verses from verses 5 to 11 very well known it tells us of the cross of Christ and what the cross of Christ means here is the God of the universe the creator of all things and he is humbled and he is brought low and he is put to death on a cross to rescue the people of the earth the cross of Christ this is the cross of Christ it is a cross of love it is a cross of humility it is a cross of sacrifice so what does it mean then to be an enemy of the cross of Christ well it is to be an enemy of all those things of love humility and sacrifice

Paul shows the seriousness of this doesn't he in verse 19 so verse 18 he tells us that these earthly minded people are enemies of the cross and then verse 19 their destiny is destruction opposition to the cross of Christ ultimately leads to destruction and this in a sense is path number one the earthly things the earthly minded the path that we all start out on you don't have to choose this path I mean we do every day but we don't have to make a conscious decision even to be on this path we are born with this instinct we are born with this desire to put ourselves as number one you see earthly mindedness is opposed to humility and sacrifice and love it is about being number one it means to be me minded earthly minded means to be me minded our selfish and sinful ways put us put us in direct opposition to humility and being other centred our destiny then is destruction this is a path we did not need to choose we were there but we continue to choose every day by our actions it is the path we start down as unbelievers in Christ and it's the one we choose to walk on

Paul then tells us that to be earthly minded is to be driven by your stomach to be driven by your stomach now that doesn't mean that you like food or not or anything like that but what he's saying is the God that we look to the God that we look to is not the God of the universe the God who is beyond us and outside of ourselves and is the creator and just judge of the whole world the God we look to is in our stomach and the stomach in this case is the source of those selfish desires and those selfish appetites Paul elsewhere in the book of Romans chapter 16 he puts it this way talking again of earthly mindedness for such people are not serving our Lord Jesus but their own appetites that's the God of the stomach to be earthly minded is to serve ourselves finally he says the last phrase their glory is in their shame their glory is in their shame it's not beauty or love or hope or joy or humility or all the things that we see in the cross of Christ that the earthly minded strive for it's not really about mending the neighbor's car or volunteering for the tidy towns or giving money to the cats and dogs home they might do those things but it's really to ease their own conscience no the earthly minded instead ultimately are boasting in the very things they should be ashamed of glory in being able to spend my money and to spend my time on myself purely on myself because well

I deserve it and that's what I want and that's what makes me feel good boasting and continuing in destructive and immature behaviors maybe it's glorying in having sex with whoever you want casting off all restrictions living so called free lives or the case yesterday where two Irish women live tweeted on the internet their trip to England to carry out an abortion glorying in the shame of ending a life in the womb they glory in their shame as a parent will warn their own flesh and blood so Paul warns his spiritual children in verse 18 for as I have often told you before and now say again with tears many live as enemies of the cross of Christ and these tears of Paul for his spiritual children are no different to the tears of a mother or father who will who will plead with their child to stay home and not go out in that car with those drunken friends into the city because the parents know can only go wrong it's very simple brothers and sisters this morning there are those that should not be followed in this world there are those that should not be followed in this world and in this life they are not ultimately followers of Jesus even if they utter familiar sounding words and wear the clothing of a sheep they are in fact wolves enemies it says of the cross of

[17 : 42] Christ the cross that shows humility is not their cross it is shameful and sinful actions that they are boasting about the cross that lifts our eyes and lifts our gaze upwards and towards Jesus it's not their cross no it is satisfying sinful urges in the stomach that is their God the cross of Christ that brings rescue and it brings resurrection it's not their cross because their destiny is destruction this is the wrong path there are many examples of this peers people we know who say they are following Christ yet by their behavior and by their example they are just constantly pushing so called boundaries they are not the example to follow it is the wrong path and Paul tells us in verse 15 all of us who are mature should take a view of such things verse 15 and he says even if you don't fully see the danger even if on some point you think differently you can't quite see why this is a problem

Paul says God will make it clear to you God will make it clear to you but then he says only let us live up to what we have already attained verse 16 only let us live up to what we have already attained or what we have already understood and what he is saying whatever stage of your Christian life whether you are a new Christian been a Christian for a long time whether you are struggling whether you are a mature Christian or maybe immature in some areas regardless of where you are in the Christian life you know enough to follow Jesus you know enough to follow Jesus follow godly examples verse 17 join with others in following my example brothers and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you you are not to follow the path of those that are pushing the boundaries of so called Christian freedom such freedom is really just chaining yourself to the path of sin and destruction we spent some time looking at that path that is one path or one destiny that of the earthly minded but there is another path that Paul wants us to show wants to show us this morning and that is the path of those whose citizenship is in heaven the first 11 verses of chapter 3 have been about

Paul letting go of his own wrong path I don't know if you remember the sermon last week or familiar with those verses but it's Paul letting go of the wrong path letting go of family history he's letting go of his academic achievements he's letting go of his good reputation and his high standing among the community his peer group done he says it's actually a stronger word than that but I'm going to say dung dung he says rubbish compared to taking hold of Christ he casts it all off he casts himself away from that path that way of living all even all the good things that you could look on and say isn't Paul great he casts them all off so he gets to verse 10 and this is he falls into almost a yearning of praise and desire he wants to know Jesus in verse 10 he wants to know the power of his resurrection the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings becoming like Jesus in his death and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead and experience life in the heavenly places where Jesus is and he has to stop and that's where we get to in verse 12 he catches himself because he's run ahead he's almost run too far ahead of us in what he said in verses 10 and 11 so he slows down and he lets the readers catch up verse 12 not that I've already obtained all this for I've already been made perfect but I press on to take hold of that for which

Christ Jesus took hold of me I haven't reached the end of the path don't mistake me here I know I'm getting really excited and my thinking and my perspective on life has so changed it's been so transformed that I can almost feel like I'm there at times in the heavenly places with Jesus but I haven't got there yet brothers verse 13 I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it I think the single greatest help in my working life today came in the very first year I started I was back in 2001 September it was a week after the 9-11 attacks in the US it was the 17th of September my first job for Motorola based here in Cork now shut down but at the time there was about 400 engineers working out in Manhattan I was a graduate I'd done electrical engineering and now I was getting paid to be a software developer

I won't get into details but it's a little bit different from what I'd done in the degree I didn't even know what I didn't know have you ever been in that position you don't even know enough to be known that you're ignorant but here's the thing as a graduate engineer this older senior more experienced engineer he took this graduate under his wing there was a big new engineering project very important to the company and he reached out and he pulled me into his team divided up the work found a really critical bit I was completely ignorant and he said Ralph you do this bit is that okay and I went yeah it's all the same to me I'll do something and I had little or no experience in the area I got a big thick manual with the computer chip information and some sample code and that was it the confidence of a mentor the support of a team we got there in the end by the way just in case you're all worried but you know as Paul writes to the

[24 : 27] Philippian church in a sense he's like someone like that isn't he he's been yanked he's been pulled he's been taken hold of into God's kingdom my work mentor reached down from his position and he took hold of me for a particular goal and Jesus in a similar way has reached down and he's taken hold of Paul in verse 12 I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me for the believer this is always the starting point for the path to heaven verse 12 I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me or he puts it in another way in verse 14 doesn't he I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus

Christ takes hold of us and then we learn to take hold of Christ that is our starting point this morning brothers and sisters it's the starting point for everyone God the father has called you heavenward he's called you heavenward and his anointed son has stooped down he has stooped down and he's taken hold of you and he's bringing you into his kingdom and he's bringing you into his purposes God calls us and then it's as if his right arm his own son has been extended from the heavenly realm and grabbed on to us and Paul was captured in this way wasn't he his path in life Paul's path was literally the path of destruction he was an enemy of the cross of Christ we see that in verses four to seven he was a persecutor of the church the most ignorant and earth bound slayer of God's plans and God's people he spent his time ensuring that

Christians were rounded up put in prison and executed that was Paul's path yet he like of all of us who believe was grabbed by Christ on the road to Damascus he was powerfully converted he was grabbed by Christ and in faith he turned to Christ for salvation and forgiveness that is a starting point for all heavenly bound people Jesus Christ has reached down and taken hold of us but that has a massive massive effect on our lives it truly does because it's placed us now between two worlds or two kingdoms we are still truly part of this current age we experience it just like everyone else we can stand on the beach and feel the breeze and we can hear the water coming in and out and we can enjoy that we can be in the hospital holding a perfect newborn baby and just feel the joy that that brings and we can experience the anger when our children are bullied can feel the confusion when a loved one becomes seriously ill and ultimately the searing pain when someone close to us dies we experience all of that as everyone else does but something or someone has changed our world

Christ came and he brought with him his kingdom and the bible talks about it as being the age to come a spiritul age an age of blessing and godly rule and Jesus has brought that age his birth his life his death his resurrection his ascension back to heaven that means that this age to come is here it is now it's not just a future thing but it is really truly here yes the old age is here as well and it's passing it is a passing age the age of sin the age of decay the age of death it's a passing age on the earth but it's still it's still the world we feel and experience every day events on the world stage can still shock us you know sometimes we see things in the news and we think am I becoming immune to this over the summer we were confronted with many cases but one

I think stands out and that's Islamic based terrorism this time in Nice in France carnage carried out by a single man in a truck running over people who were out celebrating that evening 80 people or more than 80 people dead and over 300 injured a friend or maybe not as strong as a friend someone I know reasonably well on Twitter sent a simple response to this he said I thought I kind of understood this world I don't he's an atheist he ultimately has to deny that there is any real meaning or purpose in a materialistic universe of atoms just bouncing around yet when confronted with the hurt and such obvious evil he knows that his attempt to understand the world has failed it is utterly failed he cannot understand there is no framework or understanding for the atheist as to why he should feel that to really feel such sadness shows us that there is true meaning and true purpose we have moral obligations that we can't ignore and other people have similar moral or exact same moral obligations as we have the world is out of joint it is broken in many ways even the atheist knows that or what about when illness hits home when illness hits home and plans for our future are just blown apart you know you're going along what we're going to do this year what we assume and illness just runs amok work disappears our governments promise that if you work hard keep your head down and contribute to society you'll be fine and then we lose our job and those empty promises are gone or our close friends even our church family hurt us first in small ways and then big ways there's no apology there's no reconciliation why is life such a struggle with the people that I should count on for comfort and for help you see this age this passing age is not as it should be and we can give hundreds of more examples at times in fact it's just completely unjust and completely unfair but the

[32 : 04] Christian knows this and the Christian knows this most of all because Jesus was a man who always walked on the right path from day one to the very end and continues to walk the right path he is the true citizen of heaven he always honored God he always did the right thing in every situation and circumstance he was truly innocent yet he was humiliated he was beaten and he was ultimately nailed to a cross the world is broken we see that in Nice France absolutely but I think ultimately we see the brokenness with Jesus in Jerusalem on the cross on the cross the truly innocent the truly innocent dies in the place of the truly guilty this broken world takes the perfect God man and puts him on the cross but but God is sovereign the Lord is not taken by surprise by dying on the cross the innocent in place of the guilty

Christ has reached down Christ has reached down and locked his arm to yours oh the wonder that God has called us heavenward and taken hold of us in Christ and through the cross he has pulled us out of the mud and he's pulled us out of the mess and he's placed our feet on the rock he's put us on that secure setting our citizenship verse 20 it is in heaven it is now today it is in heaven it's not it's not just future it is now today we are truly gripped by Christ and we are united to him now by faith so that where he is we are where Christ is today is where we are today we are with him in the heavenly places that's an amazing thought because of our being united to Christ we are as entitled to heaven as Jesus is let that sink again the father fully accepts the son as entitled as

Jesus is to heaven so we are we have as much a right to be there as Jesus the son has strangely then because of all of this this is why as believers we feel more than most the struggle this morning do you ever think that why do I feel that life is such a struggle well I think as believers yes we have the common understanding with everyone in this world but I think as believers we feel it most the struggle between how the world is and how the world should be and this is why we pray our father in heaven hallowed be your name your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven as we face this tension in daily life between how it is and how it should be always always always come back and start here as

Christ does as Paul does Christ has taken a hold of you as you feel that struggle every day in all these ways Christ has taken a hold of you through the cross we must continue then to press on if he has taken hold of us we must continue to press on and put our trust in him the prize the prize it says is Christ himself the man who has gone before us the Lord Jesus himself is our prize God himself united to a fully human nature will be the glory of heaven that we will one day see and rejoice in he will bring this old age to a close it will be finished and the new age is going to be fully rolled out look with me verses 20 and 21 but our citizenship is in heaven isn't that great to hear this morning our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a saviour 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 the glorious truth this morning is here that this old frail body body this broken world this sin infested life this life of men in trucks running over children this life of illness striking our families all of that is going to be pushed aside and set right it's going to be fully swept away by the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ once and for all his power it says in verse 21 is going to bring everything back under control everything will be back in the order it should be that we intuitively know it should be like this it shouldn't be like that it should be like this where a kind and loving creator is visibly ruling and sin and death and

[37 : 56] Satan are no more he is the one when he returns who will reorder the world to be as it should be and in the same instance it says he's going to transform our lowly bodies our bodies that are subject to death and decay and illness he's going to transform this be like his glorious resurrection body his physical body that will last for eternity here then is the answer to Paul's longing do you remember his longing to want to know Christ back in verse 10 and the longing of all of those who want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection here's the answer we await our savior from heaven and he's going to make all things right press on Paul tells us press on that path remember the book ends and this then is how we stand firm and this is why we should rejoice we press on to take hold of

Jesus our prize and wait for his final return let's speak to God in prayer our heavenly father we we give you praise this morning that you have called us heavenward through your son Jesus we thank you for the cross we confess lord that we are we are tempted to live selfish and destructive lives even as believers but we thank you that you have taken hold of us help us to keep a hold of you through life father we we look forward to that day when the sun returns in glory and everything is put right help us to live in the light of eternity each and every day in Jesus name amen