

Citizens Awaiting their King

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn this evening to Paul's letter to the Philippians and chapter 3. We can read from verse 17. We're going to look at verses 20 and 21 especially.

Philippians chapter 3 and reading from verse 17. Brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

For many of whom I have told you often and now tell you even with tears walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.

By the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

[1 : 1 1] Following on from our morning study where we looked at one or two points of what is, of course, such a great subject, the kingship of Christ or Christ as he understood himself to fulfill the Old Testament types of kings that look forward to the coming of the messianic king or the saviour king that, of course, is Jesus himself.

And from that chapter in John 18, verse 37, we saw how Christ spoke about his kingdom and how all these verses in chapter 18 of John are packed with references to him as a king and how in his being rejected as well, his kingship was being rejected by the people and the leadership of the day.

And yet God had designated him, even in his crucifixion, as Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. God himself, as we saw, has the last word because whatever we make of Jesus, he is the king.

Whatever we make of him or others make of him, he remains the king. Nothing alters in terms of who he is and what status and stature he has.

And we're coming tonight to look at his kingship from the point of view of those who are ruled by him, who own him as their king. In other words, from the citizenship that's mentioned here in these verses, the citizenship of this kingdom of heaven or this kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of which he's king.

[2 : 4 7] And these citizens are described here as people who anticipate his return. Now we saw this morning that the Old Testament time was a time of anticipation, a time of expectancy, a time of looking forward to the coming of the king.

And of course, when the king came, he came not in regal majesty and splendor, but in the form of a servant. He came in the ministry that Jesus had to engage in and complete, the ministry of a servant.

He came in a state of humiliation, as our catechism puts it. And as we learn from scripture, of course, that was what his state on earth was about.

He came to do service, even including his death on the cross. They were anticipating the coming of a king. And he came, but not in the way that many expected.

And we now in this age are also living in expectancy. We're living in anticipation of the same king coming to be revealed, coming to this world again, coming to deal with the last phase of the world's history, the last things, as they're usually called, of the world's history and of human destiny.

[4 : 10] Except we're not expecting him to come as he came the first time, in a state of lowliness and humiliation, in the form of a servant. The Bible makes it clear that when he comes back again, he will come back, and all will see him as he now is, in his majesty, in the glory of his person, in all his regal state and status as the king.

That's what is being anticipated here in the likes of these verses in Philippians 3. We're going to see, first of all, a little of what it means to be citizens of heaven, and then more fully look at what's said here about awaiting the king's return.

Citizens of heaven, first of all. Now the passage, as Paul very often does this, in fact, the passage here is set out in terms of contrasts. He mentions people that he calls the enemies of the cross of Christ.

And he doesn't say that disparagingly. He doesn't say that in a way that takes any pride in himself as if he was better than them.

He actually tells the Philippians about these. He describes them, as he says himself, with weeping. He told about them. He told them about these people previously.

[5 : 39] He says, I've often told you about them. But now I tell you again, even with tears, that they walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. And that's how we should be too.

That we would be more like the apostle to lament the fact, to mourn over the fact, that there are certain people who openly walk as enemies of the cross of Christ, who find it a source of great contempt to themselves, who treat it with contempt, who dismiss it as of any significance.

We should actually note that with weeping, as we pray for them, as we seek that they will come, to know the reality of Christ as the king for themselves.

But in any case, he is dealing here with the difference or the contrast between them and these people in Philippi who know the Lord like Paul himself. You can see the way the contrast is set out there.

And these enemies whose end, he says, is destruction. And the difference, of course, is huge. The contrast is huge. Their end is destruction.

[6 : 53] Our end, he says, of himself and these Christians, is we're waiting for a savior. It's not going to be destruction, but salvation as the end for those people who are the people of God, the citizens of this kingdom.

Then he says, not only is there end destruction, but they worship the flesh. They worship their body. Their God is their belly, their physical appetites.

The physical side to their being is really what they focus on. And the contrast with that, of course, is set out in a way in which the body for the Christian is something that they want to see transformed at the coming of this king.

And that fits so well with our own circumstances, with our own day, with our own generation. Because as you look out there, you find so much given to the body and an emphasis on the body and on physical things.

Even to the extent of having to try and somehow cover up the aging process beyond what's really appropriate. And it doesn't matter how many nips and tucks you have and how many things you actually engage in, surgically or otherwise, to actually try and keep a 30-year-old appearance.

[8 : 26] It's not going to happen because we are dying and we are decaying in our bodies. And from the moment we're born, we begin to decay.

We're hissing for the grave. And what Paul is saying is, these worldly people, these enemies of the cross of Christ, you can tell them, you can actually see them from this point of view.

They are lavishing so much care and so much attention on something that's dying. Whereas we are looking for the Savior who's going to transform our lowly body, as he puts it.

You see, these enemies of the cross of Christ, the body's not lowly, they're worshipping the body. Look at all the ways in which people worship what is physical in the world that we belong to today.

Nothing really in their minds beyond that physical, beyond these things that are tangible, that you can touch, that you can see, even to the extent of their bodies. That's the limit of their world.

[9 : 30] These are their borders. But the Christian is saying, oh, this body is a lowly body. This body isn't something that you worship.

It's not something that you exalt beyond what is legitimate. Yes, you take care of it. You don't abuse it. You don't mistreat it. But you don't worship it. You don't venerate it.

You don't treat it as if it was not going to die. Paul says this is our lowly body. In other words, it's affected by sin. It's been brought under the curse that God mentioned to Adam.

The day you eat of it, you will die. That's what our body is presently. subject to death. Still affected by sin's legacy. That's why Paul is saying, this is the great contrast.

These citizens of heaven, they're not looking for this body to be maintained as it is. And to go on as long as possible trying to mask the aging process. These citizens of heaven are looking forward to something far better than that.

[10 : 37] They're looking forward to a new body. A body that will be like the body of Christ himself. Because he's going to transform our lowly body.

And then he moves on and says, the contrast is also seen in the fact that they glory in their shame. They glory in their shame.

That too is very appropriate and up to date in its description of the world in which you live.

People glory in their shame. Things which the Bible mentions are shameful. Things which God sees as shameful. Things which God himself says is a shame for any human being to engage in whatever type of behavior you think of that God calls shameful.

Well, that's what it is. But the world and these enemies of the cross of Christ this is one of the things that characterizes them. They glory in their shame. They boast in their shame.

[11 : 37] They boast in the freedom they have to do things that others say are shameful that God says is shameful. But he says these citizens of heaven they don't glory in their shame.

What they glory in is Christ himself and what is going to come with him when he comes the glory that is going to accompany him their glory as they will be transformed.

And then finally he says they mind earthly things with their minds set on earthly things. as we said they don't really see beyond what is earthly they're firmly anchored to the earth whereas Paul is saying the contrast is apparent but our citizenship is in heaven.

You might say the citizenship of those enemies of the cross is this world it's this earth they belong to the earth they've never been taken up above what is earthly they still have their lives anchored and rooted in what is earthly and really when their bodies return to the earth that's about it as far as their inheritance is concerned as far as their citizenship is concerned they are earthed but our citizenship is in heaven.

and you can't get a greater contrast than that. That's he saying what our citizenship is about. So you see all the way through what this description is of these enemies of the cross there are contrasts with those citizens of heaven.

[13 : 34] And of course you follow all of that through and apply it to your own life as I must put it to my life as well. What is the end for us is it destruction or salvation?

What is our body? Do we consider it as something that is to be pampered and exalted or is it something so lowly and affected by sin that we're longing for the day when we have a new body when it will be transformed into the likeness of Christ's body?

What do we glory in? Do we glory in the things that God approves of or do we glory in the things that he despises? and where are we with the roots of our life?

Is it in the earth or is it in heaven? Is our citizen an earthy one or is our citizenship in heaven tonight?

There is the contrast that Paul is setting out for us there but secondly we need to have a sense of belonging as Christians we need to have a sense of belonging when he's saying here our citizenship is in heaven he's actually emphasizing this great contrast in a way that really gives a sense of belonging to that city belonging to that to that contrasting place that he calls heaven here and of course heaven for him means where Jesus is where the Lord sits as the king presently from which he's going to come to this world when he comes our citizenship is in heaven and what he's really saying is that is really the case and sometimes maybe we're just a bit too reluctant in saying this if you were to ask Paul Paul where's your citizenship he wouldn't return that to you by answering you and saying well

[15 : 30] I think it might be I hope it is in heaven he says my citizenship is in heaven God has saved me I have Christ as my savior where else can it be he really wants to set out the reality of this that this is indeed the fact of the matter you see when you get an electoral an election coming up or whenever a card comes through your door with your name on it on the electoral roll to check that your name is on the electoral roll you have to send it back just to verify that it's correct and that these are the people living in the house that have a right to vote and are given the privilege of voting so you send it back the electoral roll has your name inscribed on it and when you come to actually engage in the voting process you show your card is checked against the list your name appears there and you have that right and that privilege to vote and Paul is saying that's how it is with heaven our citizenship is in heaven it cannot be otherwise when Christ is your king when the king of heaven is your savior and your friend that's how it is for the youngest child in here tonight if Jesus is the king of their lives they are citizens of heaven their names are enrolled in heaven and the

Philippians could understand this you see because they were in an important city Philippi as a Roman colony as a very important Roman colony and in its own right Philippi was an important place but as citizens of Rome in the Roman empire their names would not be recorded in Philippi they'd be recorded in Rome they'd be kept on the register in Rome as citizens of Rome all who are citizens of Rome living in Philippi yes living in Philippi but their names were entered in Rome's records there that's how it is he says with these citizens of heaven that presently in this life in this world but their names are not recorded in this world that's for the earthy ones that's for those who belong to this earth that's for those whose citizenship does not go any longer any further than the grave but our citizenship is in heaven and it's important it's important to have an assurance about that a confidence about that you're not being over bold or somewhat bordering on being arrogant spiritually when you're able to say with confidence

I'm a Christian Christ has made me a citizen of heaven and so my name is written in heaven there's nothing boastful about that unless you say that you're boasting in Christ as Paul himself is so let's work at that assurance that assurance that we ought to have as all those who are saved that's something to see as important don't actually give place to the idea that somehow or other assurance is bad for you if you have a strong assurance that Christians should go about with as many doubts as possible and that that's what keeps them close to the Lord you don't find that in scripture you have to actually say that assurance is what you aim for that if you like assurance will be made your norm so that you will be able to say as a Christian I believe the word of God when he tells me

I'm saved by believing in Christ then it follows that I'm a citizen of heaven and if I'm a citizen of heaven that's my destiny and I will glory in that and that's the reality as far as Paul is concerned he belongs to that city he's been given a right to it through the grace of God in Christ citizens of heaven is that what we are tonight are we who are so familiar with the gospel and with the bible's teaching are we still short of being citizens of heaven do we think that being citizens of heaven is the same thing as belonging to the church or having our names on a congregational register it's not the same thing at all and in fact it's not the same thing to have your name even a communion role as to have it on the role of citizens of heaven not everybody who sits at the lord's table everywhere is saved we trust we all are here but the important thing is you come as we said this morning into citizenship by trusting in Christ by receiving the king by bowing to him by kissing his hand by receiving him for yourself as your savior king so that's the citizenship the dimensions but then he comes to speak about awaiting the king's return and the first thing we have to say about that is when he says our citizenship is in heaven from it we await a savior the lord Jesus Christ the first thing to say about that is this is an elemental or you could say a fundamental or basic doctrine it's a basic truth a basic doctrine in the teaching of the new testament and it must be held that way by the church of God in every generation you cannot ever come to the point where you see the return of Christ as a doctrine as now no longer relevant as no longer of the importance it had for the apostle because everywhere throughout the writings of the apostle Paul and John as well and Peter the return of Christ the king is of basic importance it attaches itself not only to our future but to our present life that's how they speak about it knowing that this is a great fact this is how we should live in anticipation of that's the argument they use so very often and it's as basic a truth in the new testament as the cross of Christ itself is now you see Peter if you went to Peter for example second Peter chapter three you would actually see there that Peter was engaging with scoffers as he calls them in the last days who are going to come and say where is the promise of his coming isn't he taking so long doesn't that mean that this is really not true after all and Peter answers that by verifying by asserting again the fact of the lord's return however long it's going to be in terms of years and that's important for us to retain that in our own thinking as well some people ask the question did the apostle expect Christ to come back in his own lifetime and there have been a lot of debate about that and various scholarly works and all the rest of it what did the apostle Paul himself actually expect to happen in his lifetime did it include the return of Christ the answer

to that yes and so do you and so do i as christians it's the only way properly to live in fact it's the only way that you can actually live in a way of anticipating the return of christ is to expect that he will come back in your lifetime it's part of the thinking that says seeing this is going to happen even if you are sure it's going to happen this is how i must live in anticipation of it in fact i ought to live and you ought to live as if you knew for a certainty that before you jumped into bed tonight the lord was going to come back that's how we should live as if we really knew for certain that he was coming in a few hours for the apostle that was an elemental doctrine and of course it was related to christ's ministry on earth previously the fact of christ's return is made necessary by the cross itself for one thing and by his resurrection in acts peter in his preaching there refers so often to the resurrection and one of the references made is that god has appointed a day in which he will judge the world by this person by this jesus and he has given indication of that in that he has raised him from the dead you see that the way the two things dovetail together it's more or less saying if there wasn't going to be a return of christ why was he actually raised from the dead the resurrection of christ is intimately connected inseparably connected with his return and if we give for a moment in our minds a place to doubting whether or not the lord is going to return then we're saying something negative about his cross and about his resurrection we're not really giving that the emphasis and the importance it should have because in god's eyes it's all one complete indivisible work of christ and again here's where the shorter catechism is so valuable to us when we learn to us youngsters or if we're learning it just now the shorter catechism you remember in question 28 asks what the exaltation of christ consists of and christ's exaltation consists of his being raised from the dead on the third day of his ascending to heaven of his being seated at the right hand of god and in his coming to judge the world at the last day it's the final part of christ's exaltation it's required as the final part of christ's exaltation that he come again as the king to judge the world do we believe in christ's exaltation well we have to believe in his second coming then because you can't have the one without the other and we need to maintain that in terms not just of our present conduct but our present argument with those who would despise this idea with those who would just do away with it and with those for whom a christian life is just do as best as you can in this world and that's really it i know peter and paul and john are saying by all means live as best as you can in this world in dependence on god but that's not it you're doing it because you're

[27 : 20] expecting the return of your savior who is going to come to judge the world and that's where he speaks about this eager hope from it we await a savior who will transform our lowly body and it's this word await from it we await a savior it's in greek it means something like eagerly long for something it's a bit like when a person is homesick a person away from home thinking about home and thinking of how they would love to be at home but they have to spend some more time where they are that's in a sense what paul is saying is applying it spiritually to these citizens of heaven while they're in this world this is where our citizenship is it's not in this world it's in heaven from which we eagerly await the savior i wish i could say of myself friends that every day i live was marked by an excitement at the prospect of christ's return i believe i have a sense of anticipation of it do i long for it eagerly sadly no not to the extent that i should but the apostle did and he was putting it to these philippians that's how they should be as well and therefore that comes to us as saying that's how we should be as well and that's what we should work at and that's what we should actually daily be looking at as part of our christian life because it's an awaiting in the present time it's an eager expectation it's a longing am i tonight as much in anticipation of the coming of christ as somebody who is homesick for home living elsewhere in the world and longing to be at home i wish i were that's how it should be and the reason it's not well one of the reasons it's not surely is that we just don't give enough time to consider all that it means for the lord to return all that it means for christ to come back again all that it means for christ to be revealed in his glory and deal justly and righteously with all things in the final order we could say a lot more on that i need to move on but surely it's obvious here that the first thing in the mind of the apostle in terms of this longing this eager expectation is an eager expectation for christ himself is he wants this transforming of the body as we'll see in a minute but what he's saying here is our citizenship is in heaven from it we await a savior the lord jesus christ that's what he's really longing for above everything else that he will meet with the lord himself that the lord himself will come that the lord will be revealed that the grandeur of christ will finally be revealed to himself and to the world what's the most important thing in your own thinking what is the most important thing in your future there are many ways in people in which people would answer that paul is saying for a christian living in this world having citizenship in heaven the most important thing in their future is the return of their lord it's the coming of the savior it's the appearance of this great king and what he's saying here is that he longs to see himself now in verse chapter one he's spoken about his own desire

there where you find it in verse 23 where he was in a straight he says between two things he wanted to remain and to be still of help to the philippians in this ministry i'm hard pressed between the two he said my desire is to depart and to be with christ for that is far better but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account and he knew he had to remain for a while longer for the benefit of these philippians and others too but he said to depart and to be with christ is far better and yet he's now coming in chapter three to something that has overtaken that if you like in his thinking not that he's lost his desire to depart and to be with christ but now he's jumping ahead further into the future beyond the resurrection and to the point of meeting with the king when he comes through his transformed body and that's what he's now eagerly desirous of and i think we can say that that's why he's giving the lord his full title in this verse our citizenship is in heaven from it we await a savior who is he the lord jesus christ savior lord jesus christ he's giving him his full title because he's going to come in the fullness of his majesty all eyes shall see him and every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that jesus christ is lord to the glory of god the father and your tongue and your knees and my tongue and my knees will be making that acknowledgement even if it's not willingly and lovingly it will nevertheless be made because on that day nobody will doubt who is the lord nobody will doubt who is the king nobody will doubt who is this person that's just arrived on the scene of earth everybody will know everybody will acknowledge this is jesus christ this is indeed the king the judge of all the earth the majestic one that's why here he gives him his full title just to remind us of the greatness of this person the majesty of this person and isn't it interesting that what you would expect him to say about us as christians compared to these enemies as he calls them you might say think that the description of these christians in contrast would be friends of the cross he's saying they are enemies of the cross but you are friends of the cross but that's not what he says of of course it doesn't mean that you're not friends of the cross but what he wants to present is in contrast to being enemies of the cross you are eagerly expecting a savior that's what characterizes you that's what marks you in your christian life and he's going to transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body what does that mean we can only surmise and guess even if we try to describe it how could we how can we possibly describe a body being made glorious like the body of christ's own glory or his own glorious body what we have to say is the truth of what's in the text is that's what god's people will be like that's what their bodies will be like

we go through this world with many bodily ailments we have some people in this world who have to live their whole life with bodily deformities and infirmities and restrictions mentally as well as physically but for everyone in christ for every citizen of citizen of heaven their bodies finally will be perfect will be what they were designed to be when god created us in the beginning what we brought on ourselves in the curse of sin will be gone all sin will be gone from our bodies they are raised as paul says in first corinthians 15 they are raised incorruptible no trace of corruption of sin left like his own glorious body don't you long for that day every time you're in pain every time you realize your limitations physically in this world every time you look at yourself and you realize you're decaying and you're coming nearer and nearer to the grave to the resting place of your body in this world doesn't that itself cry out to you in such a way that says oh for this time and for this day and for this return when this lowly body will be like the body of my lord when i will perfectly match what he is physically and when this sin that i have brought about by my disobedience against god and adam when it will be gone and when he will be glorified in me in my glorified body as in my soul it will be like his glorious body and it's going to be brought about by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself in other words paul is really saying by that this too is absolutely certain we needn't have any question or any doubt about whether or not this is going to come about or how it's going to come about or where does he have the ability to take this lowly body after it's gone back to the dust in the ground and raise it up incorruptible to be like his own glorious body well he tells us it's by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself and when you think of someone who has the capacity and the ability to subject all things to himself every power every principality every human being every government every event of history everything everything everything the power to subject everything to himself when you say he has that capacity how can we doubt such a relatively small thing as taking our body and transforming it into his likeness by that power that enables him to subject all things to himself that's the power that will operate in our transformation for the children you might compare this or find an illustration for it

I'm sure you've seen a cocoon where a little caterpillar like thing wraps a cocoon round itself I used to actually find look out look out for them when I was a child I used to look out for these cocoons sometimes you'd find them hanging on a window or on a wall and I would take it down carefully and put it in a little matchbox and put it in a drawer at home and every day I would check it to see if anything had happened and for quite a long time nothing happened and then one day you would actually open the box and there was this beautiful butterfly or moth fluttering out of the box what a change what a transformation and you'd find this cocoon this ugly dark thing just left behind it had come out of it in a totally new state and Paul is saying that's really essentially what a

Christian is going to be like too the body is sown in corruption this lowly body this body that's so much subject to sin and its effects but by this power of Christ he's going to transform it so that it will be like his glorious body and that is the hope of every Christian and how does Paul conclude what does he conclude from that how does that return of the king and all that's tied up with it how does it bear upon your life presently well he says therefore my brothers stand firm thus in the Lord don't give anything away of what it means to be a Christian to live as a Christian stand firm in the

[41 : 20] Lord against all countering and opposite views of what the future may be and of what the Bible teaches and of what you expect therefore stand on the basis of the factuality of his return and the factuality of what he's going to do when he returns therefore stand firm in the Lord my beloved and for you and for me too that's what we conclude from this study this evening the Lord is coming the king will arrive he will transform his people to be like himself where does that leave me tonight where does it leave you you have to answer that question for yourself you are either a citizen of heaven or you're not you either eagerly expect the Lord or you don't you either hope for this great transformation or you don't you either belong to the earth or you belong to heaven our gracious God what a glorious salvation you have prepared for us what a glorious destiny belongs to your people as citizens of heaven

Lord we thank you for the love and the grace that has made such a provision for us we cannot ever think of ourselves as recipients of such glory when you teach us of what we are as sinners oh Lord our God we say of ourselves who am I that we should deserve this that we should have such a glorious destiny but such as what you have prepared for your people help us never to doubt it even though we don't deserve it grant your blessing to us Lord as we have come once again to interact with your word make us thankful that you have revealed all these things to us so that your coming will not catch us by surprise hear us now and accept us we pray for Jesus sake amen