

# All Immigrants

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[ 0 : 00 ] I wonder if you would like to turn to your Bibles and open to Philippians chapter 3 on page 186. You don't have to. It's not a rule, but you may find it helpful, particularly if the preacher wanders off.

You can read the passage for yourself. As you're doing that, please know that this next week as a number of us from the congregation head to Toronto to the National Essentials Conference, we'd be greatly grateful if you would pray for that conference and what comes out of it. It's very important for us here and I think for the National Church.

I discovered this week where the phrase, pie in the sky when you die, by and by, comes from. Some of you may know this. It's from a song written by Joe Hill.

He was a political activist, a union organiser in the United States earlier last century. It was an anarchist movement and they tried to take over Mexico and failed.

He was framed for murder in Utah and executed. He was a scoundrel and before he was executed he wrote to the manager of his union and he said, Goodbye Bill, I die like a true rebel. Don't waste any time mourning. Organise.

[ 1 : 26 ] And then he said, it's a hundred miles from here to Wyoming. Could you arrange to have my body hauled to the state line to be buried? I don't want to be found dead in Utah. Which I think is a great phrase and apparently when he stood before the firing squad he was the one that called out fire.

So, he was very naughty. He actually, he used to, he'd go to the streets in Chicago and he'd dress up in a business suit and at night he would come out on the street and call out, I've been robbed, I've been robbed.

And people would gather round and he would launch into a five minute address on how capitalism had robbed him of his labour. And when people were getting bored, his friends would gather round and they would sing some of his songs.

The most famous song is The Preacher and the Slave. And he resented and hated the Salvation Army workers in Chicago. He used to come out on the street and preach salvation, offering salvation when what the workers wanted was food.

And so, he wrote this song as a devastating take-off of the hymn, In the Sweet By and By. And the chorus goes like this, I won't sing it. You will eat by and by in that glorious land in the sky, work and pray, live on hay, you will get pie in the sky when you die, and everyone calls out, that's a lie.

[ 2 : 55 ] And the phrase has come to mean the absolute emptiness and futility of believing in heaven. The deceptive and illusion that Christianity offers in the afterlife when we ought to be living now, focused on this world and this life today.

And I think there are people who think, in fact they've spoken to me, who think that the Christian faith is a massive fraud. It's an attempt to make us behave well with a threat of hell if we don't, and heaven if we do.

And it's interesting, I don't know why this is, but in the last ten years, everyone who's said that to me has not spoken with a Canadian accent. They've all had English accents. I don't know what to make of that. Now, as we have been thinking about heaven, death and dying, and eternal life, the question obviously is what about the here and now?

I mean, we can talk about the new Jerusalem and the new heavens and the new earth. What does the gospel mean to us now? Is Christianity just a great big wait for the spiritual holidays?

And the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 3 verse 20, He's writing to a group of people in Philippi.

[ 4 : 26 ] And in 42 BC, the Emperor Octavian gave this city in Greece the very high privilege of being a colony of Rome. So here you understand, here is the city in Philippi, and the laws and the

administration and the government of this city comes from Rome.

All the way that they put their life together was Roman. They lived in Greece, but their lives were controlled by the rule of Caesar. Some people say it was more Italian than Rome itself.

Here is the New Testament definition of what it means to be a Christian. Our citizenship is in heaven. And that does not mean we're just a colony here waiting to get there, but it means that our true life, our true selves, comes from somewhere else and it comes now.

You see, in that verse Paul does not say our commonwealth will be in heaven. He doesn't say our citizenship will be in heaven. It's in the present tense. It's now.

It's a reality and a present fact. And that means that all people who follow Jesus Christ and call him as Lord live in this world. We live here in Vancouver or wherever you live, and the whole orientation of our life is under a different rule.

[ 5 : 48 ] We don't serve the gods of this age. We serve our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. It's not that someday we're going to come under his loving and sovereign rule. It's that we are under his sovereign rule now.

And that the decisions and actions that you and I take today and tomorrow are radically affected. I don't know if you've ever noticed this, but when the New Testament appeals to us to live holy lives, it doesn't say live a good life so that you will go to heaven.

It does the opposite. It says, Because you are a child of heaven, because you are there now, be holy. That's why morality and holiness are two entirely different things.

Morality is about an action, whether it's good or right or bad or motives. But holiness is about living under the rule of Jesus Christ. And because we live under his rule now, it makes a difference in how we behave.

Do you remember the Apostle John said this? Beloved, we are God's children now. It does not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

[ 6 : 58 ] Consequence, everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. I think that goes some way to explaining why it is that we feel sometimes that our non-Christian neighbours are better than we are it ought not be true, but it is sometimes true.

Because the issue of being a citizen of heaven is not primarily a moral issue, but it means we belong to a different place. And the question I hope you're asking is, what on earth does that look like?

I mean, in practical terms, give me an example, give me an illustration, give me something I can imitate. And that is exactly what Paul does. Look back at verse 17.

Brethren, he says, brothers and sisters, join in imitating me and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. Very powerful, isn't it, when you have a concrete living example.

If you get in your car and drive down Granville Street, before you get to 16th, you'll see the Falun Gong protest on the side of the road. I've driven past there many times and I confess I don't really understand their beliefs.

[ 8 : 12 ] Yesterday, as I drove down Granville, I noticed they have some colour photographs of some of their members being tortured. and the whole issue of their religious freedom suddenly becomes very concrete.

When I was a teenager in a youth group in Australia, there were two blokes who were four years older than I was who became Christians and they came into the youth group and over the next few years, they opened their lives to me.

And although I'm sure they didn't think that they were trying to be an example to me, the concreteness of their decisions and the struggles that they had and the fact that they shared them with me was a great example to me.

And a number of times in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul says, imitate me as I imitate Christ. He's not saying I'm perfect, I'm sinless.

I mean, just look back to verse 12. He says, I'm not perfect. It's not my own yet. Verse 14, I press on to the goal of Christ. He says, I know I'm sinful.

[ 9 : 17 ] I'm struggling to confess my sins every day. But he recognises the power of his concrete life example for other Christians.

When he writes to the young pastor, Timothy, he says, don't let anyone despise you for how young you are, but set an example for the believers in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity.

See, you don't have to be a certain age to set an example. You don't have to be 45 to set an example for other people. In fact, and you may not like me saying this, whether you like it or not, you and I are examples to other people.

We're either good or bad ones. If you've been a Christian for five years or more, you ought to be able to take a new Christian and say to that person, walk with me, imitate me as I imitate Christ. That's exactly what God did for us, wasn't it? He didn't just speak and reveal himself at his grace. He entered our world in flesh and bones. He lived among us.

[10:25] And Jesus has left us a pattern, a life that we may follow in his footsteps. And you can't have a more positive demonstration than that, can you? I mean, Jesus' life forever demonstrates the unbreakable connection between faith and conduct.

So, what does Paul do here? In this passage, he gives us two examples. One is a negative example, which I think sometimes can be very helpful, and one is a positive example.

And they are the two sides of the one coin. And I'll just confess this right now. I've chosen this passage for the positive example, but as I've been working on it, the balance, we need to spend some time in the negative example.

So, let's look at that first. The negative example is verse 18 and 19, and it means living now as an enemy of the cross. Verse 18, For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

He is not speaking of non-Christians. He is speaking of people who claim to be Christian. And he is moved to tears by their sense of betrayal.

[11:46] They say they believe in the cross of Christ, but in their behaviour, they demonstrate a deep hostility to the cross, and they are still a temptation for the Christians at Philippi, giving them a model to follow.

The Bible says over and over and over again, the infallible proof of what you and I actually believe is our behaviour. We can fool other people some of the time.

We can fool ourselves probably even more of the time. We can pretend that we are orthodox. And the appalling truth is that even when we do that, we can still live as enemies of the cross. And I imagine the people in Philippi, who Paul is talking about, would have been shocked to have heard him speak this way.

They are not teaching heresy. They are not teaching wrong things about the faith through their words. It is their behaviour that demonstrates that they are enemies of the cross.

And verse 19 outlines what the conduct is. Verse 19, I want to introduce you to the God of this age.

[13:11] Her name is Koilia. It is the Greek word for belly. And one of the commentators so delicately put it, it is the entire digestive apparatus.

Koilia is the goddess of self-indulgence. And her devotees give themselves to whatever pleases them bodily. And this is what she teaches.

She teaches that you should recognise nothing but the absolute authority of your own needs and your own feelings. That your personal satisfaction and the pampering of your desires, that is the path of true enlightenment.

That it is, that's what it is to live as an enemy of the cross. It's to have as your first allegiance, your belly, your desires, your passions. And what is so slippery about this goddess is that she's not limited, the worship is not limited to one liturgical expression.

That's what the great thing about the Bible, it doesn't, it's more general. There's a wondrous variety of lifestyles with which we can pander ourselves. For some people it's greed, for others it's sexual immorality, for others it's the gourmet glory.

[14:37] And I say there's nothing wrong with money or sex or food, the issue is what I live for or who I live for. I have been doing battle with rats in our backyard over the course of the last eight years.

And the score is fairly even. I have recently taken the upper hand. In the early days, you'll be appalled to hear this, I used a hockey stick to good effect.

Don't talk to me about this afterwards. They are attracted to the compost, the composter, and recently I discovered that they had eaten holes through the compost bin and were having a party at my expense inside.

For last week, I purchased a shiny new composter and I pulled the other two down. And yesterday, I was sitting in my back garden. I had a cup of tea in my hand and I was admiring the new

composter.

It's fresh and shiny. And Mrs. Short was sitting with me and we were conducting an edifying conversation on how worms do their thing. Which tells you a lot about us, really.

[16:02] I had this passage in mind. Maybe it's just this passage in mind, but it just struck me. That is a great picture of the worship of Coelia. I mean, we hold up our desires and we worship them.

And the weekly worship of the goddess Coelia begins with this call to worship, you've got to be true to yourself. And the prayers always take the same form. If it feels right, it must be right.

And the gospel that she preaches is you've got to have a fundamental allegiance to yourself, to the sovereignty and to the freedom and to the rights of expressing your desires.

What it means to live as an enemy of the cross. And I tell you, within a congregation, it always creates division. This word is used in Romans. Let me just read you in chapter 16.

Well, let me see if you're awake. Let's turn back to chapter 16 for a moment in Romans. Turn left a few pages to page 155.

[17:13] Romans 16, verse 17. I appeal to you, brethren, verse 17, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught.

Avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ but their own coelia. But the problem with serving your own coelia, if you go back to Philippians 3, is if you live for your desires, you've got to keep justifying yourself.

That's why Paul says they glory in their shame. We take the things we ought to be ashamed of and we pretend they are fabulous.

the word has a connotation and a flavour of sexual things. even though I know I am wrong, it is my right. And Isaiah says, woe to those who call evil good and good evil.

It is never enough to just serve my desires. I have to boast of my freedom and affirm my integrity. And the apostle goes right underneath this and he says at the end of verse 19, their minds are set on earthly things.

[18:29] The centre of my decision making, the centre of my desires is this earth, this life, this world. I'm basically a worldly person. My concerns and my thoughts and my dreams are dominated by the values which pass away.

And the apostle says, with tears in his eyes, their end is destruction. You see, if you look at the cross of Jesus, it is the very opposite of that kind of living.

When you look at the cross of Jesus, you see what is important to God. And what we see there is the man from heaven who is choosing to abandon his rights out of love for us to give us what we could not give ourselves.

He denies his own needs. He pays the cost of our death and our sin at his own expense. Luther says that when you look at the cross, you can see that the will of God sometimes contradicts our desires and our experience.

You cannot tell a great deal about the truth from your experience. You think about the disciples on the night that Jesus was crucified. They felt they had been abandoned by God and were lost.

[19:43] But it was in the cross where God was working their salvation. So to live for Coelia is to set our heart on this world. It's to live for ourselves. It's to live as enemies of the cross.

And that's the negative example that Paul holds up. And I want to move briefly now to the positive example. So let's go back to Philippians 3 verse 20 and 21.

But our commonwealth, which is not a great term, our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And what will he do? He will change our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Lovely. Paul shifts from they to we. You might expect him to say, let me tell you what it's like to live as a friend of the cross. But he doesn't. He says, the life, the positive life, the example life is the life lived, leaning toward the coming, watching and waiting eagerly for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[20:54] Because the cross and the coming really belong together. And when he comes, in verse 21, it says literally, he will change the body of our humiliation be like the body of his glory.

Because there is humiliation at work in our bodies. And I don't just mean because they're physical and weak and we'll get sick. It's because our bodies are the arena for the influence of koelia.

You know, it's like you say something, your tongue speaks and suddenly you realise that you've carved someone's reputation and you've added to the gossip mill. Some of us, I think, have this feeling of anger that's so practised within us, it's almost a physical pleasure.

And we move around a little like suicide bombers, hoping someone might defuse us. Or even hoping more that we might see the thrill of devastation when we unleash our anger.

For some of us, it's something that's been done to me a wrong I will not forgive and I replay it over and over and over in my mind and it becomes like a physical addiction. The day when Jesus comes, he will translate us, he will translate our bodies so that they'll become like his resurrected, glorious, immortal, holy body.

[ 22 : 18 ] not just like his body, it's formed and conformed to his body, exactly the same form that he will have.

He will have. Remember in the early days before Paul was a Christian, he hated Christians and he was trying to ravage the church and one day on his way to Damascus, the risen Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him and the appearance of Jesus was so brilliant and so overwhelming it knocked Paul to the ground and it blinded him for several days.

That is a photograph of you and me in the future. But that is not the primary thing we long for. Our supreme longing is the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

He is the one who attracts us to heaven because even with those resurrection bodies without him it would not be glorious. We are longing for a number of things, aren't we?

We long for that day when we'll be free from the presence of sin and from all temptation. We long for that day and we will be reunited with those who have died in Christ and gone before us.

[ 23 : 30 ] But above everything we long for the day when we will see Jesus Christ face to face and be forever with the Lord. So let me finish.

I want to encourage you to think this through in three directions as you go away today. The first is in terms of our relation with the world. this world.

Again and again throughout the New Testament and in church history you can see that Christians are the most effective citizens of their city precisely because our citizenship is in heaven.

We are not slaves to the God of this culture but to the Lord Jesus Christ. And our interest in our world and in the welfare of our city arises from the fact that this is God's world and he has revealed his purposes for it.

We live by different standards. We are under the rule of a different person. Yes, we live in Philippi or Vancouver but we do that as citizens of heaven. And the benefit of our contribution to this city and to this world is directly related to our serving Christ and not Coilia bearing witness to the truth of his lordship and his salvation and his coming.

[ 24 : 49 ] Secondly, in relation to other believers. This is a wonderful quote and I'm sure many of you have heard this before.

It's a long quote but I want to read it to you from C.S. Lewis. He says, It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter. Hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour.

So now Lewis is speaking about your neighbour, the person who's sitting behind you and in front of you. He says, The load, the weight, the burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it and the backs of the proud will be broken.

He says, It is a very serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person that you can talk to and now I'm not talking about those peoples just sitting around you.

The dullest and most uninteresting person may one day be a creature who if you could see now you would be strongly tempted to worship or a horror and a corruption such as if you met now only in a nightmare.

[ 26 : 04 ] All day long we are in some degree helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities it is with the awe and circumspection proper to them that we should conduct all our dealings with one another all friendships all loves all play all politics there are no ordinary people.

Isn't that a wonderful quote? Finally in relation to ourselves in relation to myself and the apostle applies this in the very next verse in chapter 4 verse 1 and I finish with this Therefore my brothers and sisters whom I love and long for my joy my crown stand firm thus in the Lord my beloved.

to be a citizen of heaven now in all that I do I want to be conformed to the death of Jesus so that I will be conformed to his resurrection.  
I live now as a child of heaven now and so I stand thus in the Lord. Amen.  
Amen.