

# Citizens of Heaven

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[ 0 : 00 ] to God's Word, the chapter that we read together in Philippians chapter 3. And I'd like us to take for our text this evening the words that we have in verse 20.

Philippians chapter 3 and verse 20. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm sure that we have all at some point been asked, Koasa how? Where are you from? As islanders we have a very strong tie, a strong kial to the place that we grew up, wherever that might have been.

And if the truth be told, there is often nowhere in this world that we would rather be than the place where we spent our childhood.

But yet, as our text before us tells us this evening, this is not actually at home. As children of God, we don't really belong here, because as our text reads, our citizenship is in fact in heaven.

[ 1 : 26 ] And so for a short time this evening, I'd like us just to think about the words that we have in verse 20, and apply them to ourselves as sojourners who find ourselves as pilgrims through the scene of time.

And so we read that our citizenship is in heaven. But what is it that Paul is saying when he writes here to the church in Philippi?

Well, the definition of the word citizen is the position or the status of being a citizen of a particular country.

It's true to say that we all have many ties in this world. That we're perhaps tied to our husband or our wife, to our children, to our brothers, our sisters, our parents.

We're tied to our job and to many other different things we find we're tied to. And so we feel that this is our home.

[ 2 : 32 ] We feel that because we enjoy so many blessings day by day that this is where we're supposed to be. And so it is.

But yet scripture makes it so abundantly clear time and time again that although we're here just now, our status isn't to be found in this world or in the things of this world, but rather in another country, that heavenly country.

It's true that this world was our home in times past, in times before we knew what it was to be anointed with that heavenly Jew.

Times where we lived for this world and all that it had to give to us. Times where we couldn't see past time or sense. It's true that in those days we truly called this place our home in our hearts.

But not now. Because as Ephesians 2.20-21 puts it, we are no longer strangers and aliens, but we are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the cornerstone.

[ 4 : 01 ] So we were once strangers and aliens to this heavenly country. We didn't know it and we certainly didn't know its king.

Perhaps we even doubted in our heart whether this place existed. We perhaps thought that it was just an airy-fairy place that was in the imagination of Christians.

But friends, as you sit here tonight, things have surely changed. Because if you're in Christ tonight, you are now fellow citizens with the saints.

And you know, our text doesn't say that our citizenship will be in heaven. Notice how it says that our citizenship is in heaven.

From the time that we were justified in Christ, from that very minute, from that very moment, we were adopted into that royal household.

[ 5 : 11 ] And when we were brought into that royal household, it's true to say that our citizenship was sealed in Christ. Because of this, the writer to the Hebrews says that, that now we desire a better country, that is, a heavenly country, wherefore God is not ashamed to be called our God, for he has prepared for us a city.

And so he has prepared, friend, for you, and for me, a city. And what a city that is. Revelation 21 says, When referring to this city, this new Jerusalem, then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.

And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. Isn't that wonderful, friends?

[ 6 : 58 ] Isn't it wonderful that the Lord in his mercy has made such a provision for us? And not only that, that he has accommodated us tonight by putting into words, by using words, even using words and symbols in order for us to be able to understand and to be able to comprehend that inheritance that is ours.

We read later in Revelation of pearly gates and of streets that are paved with gold. But yet heaven is so much more than this.

Words cannot communicate what heaven is. And so, even if words could communicate what heaven was, sinners such as we are, we wouldn't be able to go into it.

We wouldn't be able to comprehend it. And so here we have a picture painted in our mind. But friends, what we do know for sure tonight that although the pearly gates and the streets of gold, they may not be literal, what we do know that as we read in our text that God himself will be with us as our God.

Because it's true to say, surely that it is Christ that makes heaven, heaven. Revelation 7, when speaking of those who have had their robes washed in the blood of the Lamb, says that in this new Jerusalem, the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd.

[ 8 : 44 ] He will guide them to fountains of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eye. The same shepherd who has led his flock through the wilderness, the same shepherd who has fed us and nourished us here in time, he is the same shepherd that the sheep will desire to worship throughout all the endless ages of eternity.

And if he is not there, if we have all the other blessings of heaven without Christ in the midst, without the shepherd in the midst of his sheep, we cannot call this heaven at all.

In fact, it will be hell. R.A. Finlayson said that hell is to be eternally in the presence of God.

Heaven is to be eternally in the presence of God but with a mediator. And so, friends, what a blessing it is tonight that we have that mediator, Christ Jesus, that we have Christ Jesus in the right hand of the Father interceding for us on our behalf.

And it's true to say that we only love him tonight because he first loved us. Our knowledge of him is so tainted by sin that we only see, as 1 Corinthians 3.12 tells us, we only see through a glass darkly.

[ 10 : 35 ] We cannot really grasp what the things of heaven are truly like. We cannot truly grasp what Christ is truly like. But yet, then, it says, we will see him face to face.

One day, the day will break and the shadows will flee away. And you know, on that great and glorious day, as citizens of that royal kingdom, you and I, if we are in Christ tonight, we will see him face to face and we will be like him.

What will you say to him when you see him? What will I say to him when I see him face to face?

Well, I don't think we will have any words. I think all that we will be able to do is to fall at his feet and to worship his great and glorious name.

I'm sure we all remember times in our Christian walk where we enjoyed that, that sweet fellowship with the Lord and with his people.

[ 11 : 55 ] those times where our senses towards spiritual things have been heightened, where his word has almost melted out hearts.

Perhaps you're even enjoying such a time in your experience right now and if you are, that's great, hold on to it tightly. Perhaps you're sitting here and you have that me on, that longing for those times to come back.

those times where you saw the beauty of Christ in his word. But you know that that day when we stand before the throne of the Lamb, that day when we fall at his feet, it's true to say that when we see him face to face in our heavenly home, we will be blessed with an awareness of who he is. We will be blessed with heavenly blessings, not just for a short time, but for the endless ages of eternity. Because, if you'll excuse the phrase, our visas for this country, they will never run out. We will never need to reapply for citizenship, longing that we will have that fellowship with the Lamb reinstated. We'll be there forever.

[13:29] And how do we know that we'll be there forever? Well, we know because our names are written in the Lamb's book of life. We read in Revelation 3, 5, that the one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never, I will never blot out his name from the book of life.

I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. Your name and my name, if we're in Christ, our name is written in that book.

It's written in impermanent ink, sealed by the blood of the Lamb himself. Friends, do you meditate upon these things?

I wonder when it was that you thought of heaven last. When was it that I thought of heaven last? Is it that we are taken up with here and now, that our minds are clouded with the fog of this world, that we are missing a blessing, that we are unable to see what lies ahead for us as children of God?

[14:59] Perhaps you do think of heaven. Perhaps you think of heaven often. And perhaps your mind is taken to those who have gone before you.

Maybe your husband or your wife has gone before you or your parents have gone before you. Perhaps you go back in your mind to those times where you enjoyed fellowship together as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

God, but now silence. Friends, we praise God this night for his promises and we read in Revelation 21 verse 4 that in heaven, as we read earlier, there will be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.

there will be no more death, there will be no more separation, and so that begs the question, will we know one another in heaven?

Well, I think we will. Not as husbands or wives or mothers or fathers, these earthly relationships will be dissolved, but I'm almost certain that we will know one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

[16:34] We've enjoyed so many times of blessed fellowship with those who are dearly departed. We've enjoyed such special times in the spirit in a state of sin.

And so I find it difficult to believe that when we find ourselves in that state of perfection, that we will not be afforded that opportunity and glory to enjoy sinless, endless fellowship with those whom we loved and knew.

We don't know, but friends, it is good for us to think about these things. It's good for us to think about heaven. It should be even natural for us to think about heaven.

heaven. J.C. Ryle said in his little booklet, it's quite simply titled, Shall We Know One Another in Heaven? I would recommend it to you.

It's a short read. he said, I pity the man that never thinks about heaven. Cold and unfeeling must be the heart that never gives a thought to that dwelling.

[17:47] Dull and earthly must the mind be that never considers heaven. Now that is a challenge to me tonight.

Because of the truth be told, I don't know how often my mind goes there. But yet if I'm going to go on holiday, what will I do? I will spend a long time going through the brochure.

I'll look at the hotel I'm going to stay in. I'll research the area around and I'll be looking forward to that for weeks upon end.

Shouldn't it be the same for heaven? Shouldn't we be thinking about and talking about that place that our citizenship is in?

Yes, scripture doesn't tell us an awful lot about it. Christ himself speaks a lot more about hell than he does about heaven. But what we do know is that Christ will be there.

[18:53] And we know that when we see him we will be like him. Friends, there is enough in that for us to be meditating upon for a lifetime.

We see in scripture the attitude of different churches to eternity. You'll remember that the church of Laodicea didn't really care about the things of eternity or the things of the Lord. It was described as being neither hot nor cold. It was lukewarm. It was tepid. It was almost unpleasant.

And because of the coldness of the hearts of the people of the church of Laodicea, we read that the Lord said that he would spew them out of his mouth.

Friends, that is a solemn warning to us that we don't allow our hearts to become cold with the things of this world. And then we read of the church in Thessalonica who misunderstood Paul's teachings on the second coming.

[ 20 : 06 ] They thought that Christ would come at any given moment. And so what did they do? They gave up their jobs. They sat back and they waited.

And they waited. And they waited. But friends, that's not what is expected of us either. The Lord's prayer says, Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And so while we find ourselves here on mercy's ground, we have work to be done. We have to fulfil that prayer, thy will be done on earth.

You know, there's a saying, I'm not sure if you've heard it, I'm sure you have. There's a saying that goes that we can be too heavenly minded to be of earthly use.

Perhaps that's even what folk thought that the church on Thessalonica was. But friends, that saying, if you really think about it, it makes absolutely no sense.

[ 21 : 14 ] Because surely if we are heavenly minded, truly heavenly minded, we will be of more earthly use.

We will have our hearts and our minds engaged in the things of the kingdom of the Lord. And that because of this, we will be more Christ-like in our character.

We will be bolder in our witness to those around us. We read also in Revelation 2 of the church in Smyrna.

Now the church in Smyrna was quite different to the other two churches. This was a church who was looking forward to the crown of life.

Yet as they looked forward to the crown of life, they remained faithful unto death. And I think that's what we should model ourselves on as a church, that we should live our lives fully to the glory of God, doing all as I've mentioned here already, doing all as unto the Lord and not to men, but doing so very much in the light of eternity, keeping a loose grasp on the things of this world.

[ 22 : 38 ] world. In our text tonight, we're told that our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a saviour.

We await a saviour. And so, although we're not asked to down tools like the church in Thessalonica to sit back and to wait for Christ's coming, we are to wait.

We are to, as Christ asks us in Matthew 24, we are to watch therefore, for you know not that hour that your Lord doth come.

Watch therefore. Friends, he can come at any time, he can come as a thief in the night with absolutely no warning.

I don't really think, if we're being honest, and I do speak to myself here, I don't think we lay hold of this reality enough. And you know, if it was that he was to come tonight, how would he find us as a church?

[ 23 : 52 ] How would he find us as his people, as individuals? Would he find us as a church in Laodicea, a church who are Luke, Warren?

Or would he find us as those who Paul spoke of in the preceding verse, in verse 19 of the chapter we read, those whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, their glory is in their shame with their minds set on earthly things?

Would that be us? Would he find us in such a state? friends, he asks us to watch for a reason. He asks us to watch our thoughts.

Why? Because our thoughts can so easily become our words. He asks us to watch our words.

Why? Because our words can soon become our actions.

He asks us to watch our actions because our actions can become our habits and then our habits can become our character.

[ 25 : 04 ] Friends, let us always strive, as imperfect as our strivings are, let us strive to have a character that reflects that citizenship that is ours.

Let our speech always be seasoned with the salt of the gospel. let it never be said of us that our character betrays who we are in Christ, that our citizenship resembles those who are in the world rather than those who belong to the kingdom of Christ.

Our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a saviour. And you know I love that word. We await a saviour.

And doesn't that one word encourage us to walk in the status that we have been called in, that status that is ours in Christ, that status that reminds us that we have been saved by the wrath of God, that he has satisfied that divine justice, that he has saved us as we await us, that we await his coming, and that we long to see him as he is.

He is our saviour here, not our judge. If it's said that he was our judge, we would be found wanting each and every one of us.

[ 26 : 45 ] I wonder, do we long for him to come? There was an old botuch somewhere, perhaps you know where yourself, I'm not sure where, but it was said that every morning he would open his curtains, and as he met the morning light, he would say, is it today, Lord?

Lord? You see, he had that sense of anticipation of Christ's coming. Yes, we know that certain things have to happen, scripture tells us, before Christ will come again, and you may be sitting thinking, well, that can't happen tonight, there's no way.

Well, friends, remember that with the Lord, a day is a thousand years, and a thousand years is a day, and he can bring these things to pass in the twinkling of an eye.

I know of another man who switches on his radio every morning, and he does so to hear whether there is a news report that is telling us that the Jewish people have been brought in on mass.

Scripture tells us that this is a sign that the end is near. I wonder, friends, do we, as we sit here tonight, do we have that sense of expectation, that sense of anticipation of that second coming?

[ 28 : 29 ] But you know, we're not the only ones that await his coming, because we read in Romans 8 22 that that even the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Why is the creation itself groaning? Because we read, it will be set free from its bondage to corruption, and it will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children God.

Even the very creation is longing for that day when it will once again be made perfect. perfect. And what a day that's going to be.

What a day that's going to be if we can say we are the Lord's tonight. And you know that day is coming. We don't know when that day is coming.

It could be today, it could be tomorrow, it could be in a hundred years' time, but one thing we know is that it's coming. And another thing we can be just assured of is that if we are not here to see it, the Lord will come for our never dying soul and death.

[ 29 : 49 ] We are going to meet him. We have confidence tonight though. We have confidence that because our citizenship is in heaven, our hope is in him, we don't need a passport, we don't need to be interviewed, we don't need to fill out any complicated paperwork because already we have Christ in us and he, he is the hope of glory.

Samuel Rutherford, he knew something of this provision. With this, I'm nearly finished. he very much lived in time with an eye on eternity.

I have this little booklet that was my grandmother's, it's entitled The Last Words of Samuel Rutherford. The first verse of it goes like this.

The sands of time are sinking, the dawn of heaven breaks, the summer morn I've sighed for, the fair sweet morn awakes.

Dark, dark hath been the midnight, that's him talking about going through the scene of time, dark, dark hath been the midnight, but day spring is at hand, and glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land.

[ 31 : 33 ] Friends, let us rejoice tonight that we too can glory in the fact that we will dwell in Emmanuel's land, and that we can say from the very core of our being, that the best is yet to come.

Amen, and we pray that the Lord would bless these few thoughts to us, and to his name be all the praise. We can conclude now by singing again from Psalm 107, reading at verse 4.

We can sing verses 4 to 7 in conclusion to God's praise.

preaching to God's in blessings in Ann■■■ Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 34 : 10 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 36 : 40 ] Thank you.

Thank you.