

Our Citizenship is in Heaven

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn a little to the chapter we read in Philippians chapter 3. And reading at 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 often told you, 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 Savior, 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.

You can never read Paul's letters without being struck by the incredible zeal and passion and drive that the Apostle had.

If ever we come across somebody who was, we would say, 100% committed to following the Lord Jesus Christ, it is this man, the Apostle Paul.

[1 : 1 7] Now, Paul, in this chapter, is really showing us how the Christian should go. And Paul often holds out different pictures. Sometimes, for instance, it's a picture of a soldier, but on other occasions, and as here, it's more like the picture of the athlete.

And Paul shows us that there are two ways that really we ought to be running the Christian race. First of all, forgetting the things that are behind. Now, if there was any person who could glory in the things that were behind, it was the Apostle.

He spent a little while in this chapter telling us about all his attainments, that as a Jew and as a Pharisee, he was right up there with the elite.

If people were handing out awards for a distinguishing life as a Pharisee, of being the Jew, the real cream of the crop, Paul would have been up there getting all applauded.

And he recognizes that. But Paul looks back at what he had and what he got, and he looks on it as refuse. It's rubbish. It's to be discarded, because he sees that none of these things are really of any value with regard to his eternal salvation.

[2 : 3 9] Now, when Paul says to us, forgetting the things that are behind, that doesn't mean that we're to forget everything that is behind as Christians. We're certainly not to forget, because it's one of the things, you tonight are a believer, you do not forget what Jesus Christ did for you.

That would be absurd. Nor are you to forget some of the lessons that you've learned along the way. We're all being taught lessons. And I think it's one of the things that so often we regret, is how slow we are to learn, or how quickly we are liable to forget what the Lord has taught us.

Sometimes the Lord teaches us from the Word. Sometimes he teaches us in providence. Very often it is a combination of his spirit applying the Word, and sometimes reinforcing it through the providence that we're going through.

Sometimes everything comes together. And we say to ourselves, Oh, well, I've learned a lesson here. This is something I won't forget. But sometimes we do. And that's why it's important for us that we, although Paul is saying to forget the things that are behind, there are many things in the Christian life we're not to forget.

So we're to remember the things we've been taught. We're always to remember what Jesus Christ did for us. In fact, we've got to remember that, that even in glory, we will always remember what Jesus Christ did for us here in this world, because it was in this world that we were saved.

[4 : 0 8] It was in this world, actually, that he performed the work. It was in this world that he sacrificed himself as a sacrifice for sinners.

So there are aspects to this world that will never, ever, ever be forgotten throughout the endless ages of eternity. We're never to forget the blessings that we receive along the way.

But we're to forget living in the past In order that we run properly, Paul says we are to forget the things that are behind and reach out, pressing forward to what is ahead of us.

Nobody wins a race by looking behind. If you're trying to win a race, you don't spend the race looking behind you or looking beside you. You see, very often you'll see athletes and they're completely focused.

It's like everything, everything is straining within them, pressing ahead. And the apostle is saying that, that is how we are to go. And the closer we get to the finishing line, the more we press, the more we strain forward.

[5 : 15] So this is what the apostle has been saying. But then in verse 17, he says, Brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

Now some people think here that the apostle is really boasting. And they're saying to themselves, I would never, ever, ever say that.

Could you, I mean, you would never, I would never say to a person, right? You know, how do you walk the Christian life? Well, I'll tell you what, imitate me.

Keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example that you have in us. That's the way you walk as a Christian. Walk like us, walk like those within the church, and that'll be fine.

So some people think that the apostle here has been really, really boastful, and that he's telling people that in order to walk properly on the Christian road, they are to follow, they are to be like him, to walk as he walks.

[6 : 16] Now that's not what the apostle is talking about here. Because I think it's, I think it's very obvious that what the apostle is saying with regard to imitate is to imitate his desire, his pressing forward.

That's what they're to imitate. Because one of the key lessons that Paul teaches throughout all his writings is the importance of keeping our eyes fixed upon Jesus.

Not to focus upon people, not to focus upon anything else, but on Jesus Christ alone. If any person ever exalted Christ and showed the importance of following Jesus and focusing on Jesus, it was the apostle.

So the apostle doesn't mean at any moment that in order to walk the Christian life, they are to imitate him. They are to imitate him with his wholehearted zeal and desire to become more like Jesus Christ.

That's what the apostle is saying. Because the apostle has made it very clear he's not already perfect. He desires perfection. But he makes it very clear that he's not already, not that I have a verse 12, not that I have already obtained this, or I'm already perfect.

[7 : 31] But I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. So you see, the apostle is saying, that's how I'm going, and that's how he wants us to be, or how he would like us to be as well.

Now, Paul then, as he's talking to them, he then warns them. Now, as we know, Paul loves this church.

But Paul was plagued wherever he went by people who were teaching other things. And often people who were mixing many of the philosophies and the ways that were going on at the time and trying to put it into a melting pot with Christianity.

One of his biggest obstacles of all were the Judaizers. Those were people who were holding on to the old rituals, the old ways. And they would be saying to the people, I see what Paul is teaching you, this about faith in Jesus Christ.

Well, that's not enough. In order to be a real Christian, you have to embrace, you have to go through all the old rituals and the circumcision, all these kind of things. You can't be a proper Christian unless it's Jesus Christ plus loads of other things.

[8 : 46] And this used to drive Paul to distraction because wherever he went, you had these people following on. But there were loads of other kind of religions as well or other kind of strands.

There were people like the Gnostics and so on. And their kind of teaching, they really were saying that there were two realities. There was spirit and there was matter. Spirit was good.

Matter is evil. And because this world is made of matter, then that's why the world is evil and there is sin. And because the body is made of matter, then the body is evil but the spirit is good.

Now this is a very dangerous teaching because it's really saying you can live two different ways. The body, it doesn't matter what you do, the body is always going to be evil.

So in the body, you can do whatever you want. It doesn't matter. It's evil anyway. So you can live any way you want as long as the spirit is good. So this is a kind of teaching.

[9 : 50] This is one of the teachings that was going on. And they were putting it, they were mixing it in with Christianity and trying to blend the two together into, I suppose, that into kind of like antinomism where there was no law.

You were free to live any way you chose. You were safe in Jesus Christ so then nothing else mattered. So you could just live anyway. So Paul was facing, there were loads of different things all into the melting pot with Christianity.

Christianity and it was breaking Paul's heart. That's what he says, verse 18. For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

So Paul was seeing that irrespective of what people were saying, whether they were Gnostics or Judaizers or whoever, the bottom line was this, that they were enemies of the cross of Christ.

Because unless the whole focus is upon Jesus Christ, then Paul is showing that the end, verse 19, their end is destruction.

[10 : 59] It's a very serious thing. That's what it says. Their end is destruction. That it is doom. Now a lot of people would say the end is annihilation.

When you die, that's it. Matter, you're dead. But Paul is showing, no, that's not the case. Paul tells us elsewhere, it is appointed unto all, once to die.

But that's not the end. After death, there is judgment. There is, our spirits will continue, our body will go into the grave. It's not even the end of the body. It's the end of the body for a while.

Because we're told that the bodies will rise either to honor or to dishonor. But there is to be a judgment. And we are all to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. And it is there, the apostle, shows us very clearly that it is either to honor or to dishonor.

It is either to glory or it is to ruin. And here, he shows us very clearly that the end is destruction. It's a solemn thought. If we are, we can be as religious as we want.

[12 : 06] But unless we are in Jesus Christ, the end is destruction. And I find that so, I can understand Paul's tears. because, you know, you will meet many, many fine people.

And many people who are misguided and they will say to you, look, there are loads of ways to approach God. God is so broad in his approach.

He's so broad in his thinking. As long as you are genuine and sincere in your heart, then that's, that's what counts. It doesn't matter how you approach as long as you're genuine and sincere.

But the Bible holds out, no, that's not true. There is only one way to God the Father and that is in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we couldn't find our way to God himself because at the very beginning when man sinned, he ran away from God.

God had to come and intervene and make a way of access. So, no matter what anybody will tell you, there is only one way. The Bible makes that abundantly clear that there is no other name under heaven.

[13 : 19] Remember that? That's what the Apostle Peter said as he was preaching at Pentecost. There is no other name given amongst men under heaven whereby we must be saved, but in and through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, please don't be deceived. Don't hold on to this idea that somehow it will be all right on the night. That if you are kind of a sincere person and kind of genuine and do your best and you have good will towards people, that somehow that is going to make it all right.

It won't, it can't. These things are good and proper in their own way. But when we're talking about our eternal salvation, it is in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lay everything else aside. This is what matters. And so, this is what the Apostle Paul is driving home. And he says, if they tell you any other way or mix it up in any other way, their end is destruction.

And he defines what these people are like. And he says, their God is their belly. Now, that doesn't just mean with regard to, for instance, gluttony. It means living according purely to the flesh.

[14 : 35] Here are people and they will do whatever they want to do. If whatever appetites they want to satisfy, whatever lusts they want to fulfill, they will go down that road.

It doesn't matter what. That is their God. Their God is their fleshly appetite. And their glory is in their shame. And the Apostle is saying here, this is, he's saying it's quite amazing.

Here's a picture of Romans 1 where everything has been distorted. Things that people might have tried to conceal in the past. People might be a wee bit ashamed because of what they did.

There's no shame. They're actually priding themselves. They're glorying in their sin. They're publicizing their sin. They're telling everybody of their sin. And they're proud of their sin.

And the Apostle is saying that's the way they're living. They've distorted everything. And so they're glorying in their shame. And then he says their minds are set on earthly things.

[15 : 44] You see, we all have a mindset in this world. And the mindset reveals an awful lot about where we are. But these people, their mindset is on earthly things.

Their horizon doesn't go any further than this world. The boundaries are purely of this world. they never think beyond. They never think, they never really stop to think about God.

God is not in their thinking. It's amazing how many people live their lives and don't really think about God. They, God is excluded really from their thinking.

They live just purely for this life. This is it. they get up in the morning and they do whatever they do and they go to bed at night. They don't thank God.

They don't trust God. They don't depend upon God. They don't ask God. And they just live as if God is not. And yet, all the time, God is upholding them.

[16 : 47] Because the Bible tells us that we live and we move and we have our being in God. God. The God they are ignoring, the God they've no thought about, is the very God who is upholding them all the time.

And so, that's what the apostle is describing these people. They are people who say their mind is set on earthly things. That's the choice that they made.

Remember the example that John Bunyan gives in his classic in the Pilgrim's Progress of the man with a rake. And the straw. And he's looking around trying to find something that will try to find a wee coin or something where he can get a little money to get him something.

And above him, there's a hand holding out a golden crown. And all the time he's raking about. And Bunyan is almost saying, will you look up?

Look up at the hand that's holding out a crown. But no, never looks up. Just busy raking about. And that's how so many people live, whose mind is set on earthly things.

[18 : 01] They're raking about in this world. This world alone is what matters. And you say, just look up. Look up. There's a hand out, a hand out stretched with a crown of life for you.

But they won't look up. And so this is what the apostle is highlighting here. But then he changes from there. And then he says, he turns into the Christian, but he says, our citizenship is in heaven. Now, of course, the Philippian Christian would have understood very much what the apostle was talking about. Because while they lived in Philippi, they were a Roman colony. And so they were people who were under Roman justice, Roman administration.

They had all the privileges of Rome. They were like a little Rome. Rome, they were Romans living elsewhere. And Paul is saying, our citizenship, that's what he's saying here, is in heaven.

We're living in this world, but actually, we don't really belong here. Yes, we live here, but our real home is in heaven. And you know, one of the things we have to learn is to hang loosely to what we have in this world.

[19 : 18] We have many great things, many things that enrich our lives, but many great times, and if you were to collect everything together, all the experiences, all the good times, and sometimes the bad times, which is all part of it, but if we were to collect all these things, and many of them, as we say, wonderful and have been enriching in many ways, yet it's all only of this world.

It's all fleeting. We're going to have to leave everything behind. And so it's one of the things the Lord teaches us. We've got to hang loosely to what we have in this world, because it can be taken, these things can be taken from us like that, or we can be taken away from this world just in a moment.

And so we are, as it were, we're just citizens. We're just, as it were, passing through. And that's why it is so important that our focus is upon King Jesus, because the apostle is saying, our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now you and I, you're tonight a believer. we live in this world, we are part of this world, but we know we don't belong here.

Do you know that's one of the things that grows in your heart as a Christian? There's a growing awareness of your destiny, a growing awareness of where you're going, a growing awareness of that heaven is actually your home.

[20 : 57] And there are times when you actually long to get there. There are other times, maybe not, other times you might be very caught up with what's happening in life, and maybe you lose that edge.

But there have always been times in the Christian faith, as Christians, and you're saying to yourself, you know, I'm actually longing to get home. There are times in this world you start to get tired of the world.

Maybe tonight there are some people, and you're not tired of the world, but maybe there are some in here, and you are. The Lord gives us little times, and he shows us, hey, this world wears you out. And you know, this world actually sometimes gets tired of you as well. Not just you getting tired of the world, but the world gets tired of you. So we're being brought to see that we don't belong here. And yet there is also side by side with that. There's a battle goes on. Because we love the Lord Jesus Christ, and we want to follow Jesus, and we all want to be good Christians.

[22 : 02] But you know, we sometimes say to ourselves, am I actually going in the right direction? Because some days we feel failure written large over our life.

We think and we look at our lives and say, I have been a disaster as a Christian, but my thought life has been a disgrace. The way I have spoken to people is appalling.

I haven't acted as a Christian. And so there is an ongoing conflict within our lives between what we want to be and often what we are. But again, this is evidence itself of the Spirit within our life.

Because there is this battle between the flesh and the Spirit. And the Spirit continues to direct us and show us where we go wrong and convict us when we go wrong.

And so that we return to the Lord and ask for forgiveness. That is what we are doing all the time. Oh Lord, oh forgive me Lord. Forgive me for what I have done. Forgive me Lord.

[23 : 02] But you are always wanting to be following the Lord in the right way. Well this is all evidence of the citizenship of our belonging elsewhere.

So that as we travel, one eye is on heaven. If you were going to live in another, supposing you were going to emigrate, you were going to New Zealand or Australia or Canada or somewhere, and you are not just going on holiday, but you are going there.

Supposing you say to yourself, you know this, I am heading out in October, I am moving abroad. Right now, you would be getting on board as much as you possibly could about where you are going.

You would be reading about it, you would be searching the internet, you would be buying books, you would be looking at magazines, you would be speaking to people who have been there. You would want to know as much as possible, because that is where you are going.

And it is the same for the Christian. We want to know as much as possible. There is a growing desire within our heart, saying, I want to know, I want to know more. Now, actually, there is a lot told us, but it is quite limited to a certain extent.

[24 : 14] But part of the problem is that glory is going to be so different that we are going to find it is difficult to convey how it will be, because we are not going to be, it is like moving into another dimension.

It is like going into 3D. It is moving into another dimension, because when we see the resurrected Jesus, we find that he is not limited by the forces of gravity.

He is not limited by doors and physical things. He appears and disappears. He is moving in different ways, so that the limitations that govern us aren't in operation there.

So you can see straight away how it is very difficult to convey many of these things to us, because our minds cannot fully grasp it.

However, that being said, we believe it all, and our appetites are being whetted. You know, there is something of the patriarchal, pioneering spirit of the Abraham within our hearts.

[25 : 19] Remember Abraham? He went out not knowing where he went, where he was going. He was just moving forward. He was embracing the promises. He was seeing the land afar off.

He believed, and he went out. There is something of that within our hearts as well, where we know, although there is a lot we don't understand, we know it is true, and there is this longing within our heart.

So our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, as we're talking to the children today, remember the Easter, the E-A-S-T-E-R, how he is the risen saviour.

But he's coming back. That's what it tells us here. We await a saviour. Have you ever, at any stage in the day, looked up to the sky? And I thought, wow, imagine.

Imagine if Jesus is going to come just now. Have you ever done that? Have you ever thought about that? Sure you have. I wonder what it will be like. Well, the Bible has told us there are certain things going to happen.

[26 : 29] There's going to be, we're told about the great, the great, the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of the archangel, and there's going to be this, it's going to be the most amazing moment.

But Jesus is going to descend from heaven. Just, we're told, just as he rose up to heaven, the angel said, just in the same manner as you saw him ascend, he will descend.

Jesus is going to return. And so, are we awaiting? Because that's what the apostle says. We await the saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's going to come again. So it's going to be amazing. You know, it is possible. We don't know. It is possible that some in here may see the return of Jesus.

Maybe none of us will. Maybe none of us, maybe the, we don't know when he's going to return.

Because not even the angels in heaven know when he's going to return.

[27 : 28] It's when we don't expect it. There are certain things going to be happening, and they're happening right now. One of the things is, there's going to be fearful persecution of the Christian.

There's going to be fearful bloodshed of the Christian. That's happening right now all over this world. There is the slaughter of the Christian. That is one of the things that's spoken about as the time, the end time approaches.

It's where the powers of darkness are moving with all their fury against the church. So, we're waiting the return of Jesus.

Remember how it says in the end of Revelation, where Jesus says, Behold, I come quickly. And the church's response is, Even so, come Lord Jesus.

Can you say that tonight, Lord Jesus? I would love you to come tonight. Right? Hand on heart.

Would you love Jesus to come back tonight?

[28 : 30] Are you ready to meet with Jesus? You've got to sort that out yourself. This is between you and him. But it will tell you a lot of where you are, how you answer that particular question.

And then we see what will happen. Who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him to even to subject all things to himself.

What an amazing change is going to take place in our body. Our bodies, unless the Lord returns first, we will die. There will be a severance of soul and body. The soul will go immediately to back with the Lord or it will go to glory or it won't.

It will go to hell. Go to heaven or hell. But the thing is this, there's going to come a day when all the graves will open. Every grave will open. The graves, the sea will give up its dead.

Everywhere. and all bodies will rise. It's extraordinary, an extraordinary thought. Every grave opening, the body rising.

[29 : 39] Now of course we know that, I know, I don't want to hurt people, but we know that this is part of the awful thing about death, it's the whole decaying process. But that's going to stop, it's going to change.

And the body is going to rise glorious to honor. This is what's going to happen to the Christian. And what a body it will be, never again to tire, never again to be weak, never again to be sick, never a tear that will ever run down its cheek.

A body that will be perfect, a body that will resemble the body of Jesus. This is what's amazing. As mediator, we will be like him in body and in soul.

I find that extraordinary. We will resemble Jesus as he is the Jesus who rose from the dead. No wonder there's nothing to equal the Christian faith.

There is nothing in the whole wide world that holds out and offers such a future as this. And yet so many people don't want it.

[30 : 50] I hope tonight that you want this Jesus and that you will follow him and that you will ask him to come into your heart. Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we give thanks for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We give thanks, O Lord, despite the fact that so often we may struggle in the Christian faith, that there is still within us a desire to be with you and to be like you.
and we give thanks, Lord, for your patience in working in us and working through us and that day by day we are being changed and moulded and shaped.

Lord, bless and pity us, shine on us with your face. Watch over us all, we pray, and take us to our home safely and cleanse us from our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it.

Amen. Our concluding psalm is Psalm 107 from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 107.

[31 : 53] The tune is Loch Broom, we are going to sing from verse 26 to 31. Psalm 107. They mount to heaven and to the depths they do go down again.

Their soul doth faint and melt away with trouble and with pain. They reel and stagger like one drunk. Their wits end they be. Then they to God in trouble cry, who them from straits doth free.

The storm is changed into a calm at his command and will, so that the waves which raged before now quiet are and still. Then are they glad, because at rest and quiet now they be.

So to the haven he then brings, which they desire to see. O that men to the Lord would give praise for his goodness then, and for his works of wonder done unto the sons of men.

Verses 26 to 31, page 384. They mount to heaven and to the depths, they do go down again.

[33 : 22] Their souls are faint and melt away with trouble and with pain.

They will unstagger like one drunk at their which then they be.

Then they took God in trouble cry who them from streets are free.

The storm is changed into a calm at his command and will so that the ways which rich be poor now quiet are and still.

Then are they glad because are crushed and quiet now they be.

[34 : 50] So to the heaven he them brings which they desire to see.

All that men too the Lord would give grace for his goodness then and for his work of wonder done unto the sons of men.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, rest and abide upon each one of you now and forever more. Amen.