

Citizens of Heaven (Part 1)

Philippians 3:17 – 4:1

3 April 2022

Halifax, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

Before we begin our new sermon series in Hebrews, we will have a few more sermons on various matters.

- This week, I want to have the first of two sermons from Philippians 3:20 on being citizens of heaven.
 - Next week, we are going to have Pastor Martin Dendekker from Covenanters ARP Church in the Valley preach for us. I will be on my way from Presbytery (by car) and will be preaching at Mt. Zion in Moncton. And their pastor, Michael Jaatinen, will be preaching in the Valley.
 - So I will plan to do part 2 of this *Citizens of Heaven* theme two weeks from today when we plan to welcome Lucas and Vitoria Pedroso as new members and baptise their newborn son, Theodore.
- I chose this *Citizens of Heaven* theme in part because we are having a baptism and receiving new members.
 - But I also chose it because I want to encourage you with what a great privilege it is to be a citizen of heaven.
 - It can be so easy to lose sight of that, and when we do, we can easily grow discouraged and lose our ability to be vibrant witnesses to unbelievers and helpful encouragers to each other.
 - We are much more easily tempted, too, and that can have horrendous consequences.

Please listen carefully now as I read the passage in which our text is found.

- I will begin with chapter 3, verse 1.
- Here is the word of God.

Philippians 3:1 – 4:1: Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you *is* not tedious, but for you *it is* safe. ² Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, ⁴ though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ⁷ But what things

were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I

may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. ¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. ¹⁸ For many

walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* belly, and *whose glory is* in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” ^{4:1} Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word.

Note especially verse 20 where it says: **“For our citizenship is in heaven.”**

- That is what I want to focus on in particular.

Citizenship was an important matter to the people at Philippi.

- Philippi was a colony of Rome which meant that the citizens of Philippi were counted as citizens of the capital city itself.
 - Paul is suggesting that as believers, the Christians at Philippi (and all Christians) have a similar relationship to Jesus Christ who now has His throne in heaven.
 - We are foreigners in this world. Our home is not earth, but heaven. We have all the rights and responsibilities of citizens of the kingdom of righteousness where Jesus is.

There are two tracks that I want to follow related to this citizenship.

- This week, I want to look at the contrast that Paul sets forth between those who are citizens of heaven and those who are merely citizens of the earth.
 - There are five things that radically change.
 - What you rely on for salvation changes
 - Your destination changes
 - You have a complete change of gods
 - What you glory in (or boast in) changes
 - Your focus changes from earthly things to heavenly things
 - And in the second sermon, in two weeks, I want to look at the unity we enjoy with each other as fellow citizens of heaven.

Let's proceed with this week's topic—

- There is a radical, through-and-through, change that takes place in you when you become a citizen of heaven.

I. First, what you rely on for your salvation drastically changes.

A. We become citizens of heaven when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

1. There is a change in that we come to see that we need to be saved.
 - We see that we are not citizens of heaven.
 - We see that we are estranged from God by our sin.
 - We see that we are both guilty and unfit to come to Him.
 - We see that our guilt calls for extreme punishment.
 - We see that our unfitness calls for complete rejection.
2. There is a change in that we come to see that we cannot save ourselves.
 - We realise that the matter is far beyond us. (We could sooner jump over the moon).
 - We realise that cleaning up our life, even if we could, would do nothing to remove our guilt.
 - We realise that no sacrifice or offering or great work we might do could help.
 - We realise that there is nothing that any mere man can do to save us or that we might do collectively to save ourselves.
 - We realise that we are shut up to nothing but God's mercy.
3. There is a change in that we come to rely on the Lord to save us.
 - We see that He has called us to look to Him to be saved.
 - We see that He has promised that He will save us if we will leave it to Him.
 - And so we do look to Him and we cry out: "Have mercy on me, a sinner!"
4. There is a change in that we come to rely on Jesus as crucified to save us.
 - We see that the Father sent the Son to come and save us.
 - We see that the Son became human flesh that He might represent us.
 - We see that He was the first to live a righteous life, to live the way people must live to be acceptable to God.
 - We see that, by this, He was accepted and began a kingdom of true righteousness. He was the first member of that kingdom and the one who represents all the rest.
 - We see that, to save us, He took our guilt and was sentenced to the cross for our sin.
 - We see that, on the cross, He paid the full penalty so we could be pardoned.
 - And so we look not just to Jesus, but to Jesus as crucified to save us that we might be forgiven and enter God's kingdom.
5. As soon as we believe, we become citizens of heaven.
 - Our citizenship is changed from earth to heaven.
 - We enter the house and family of God and are no longer of this world.

B. Paul refers to the radical hatred of those who are not citizens of heaven in v. 18.

- **For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:***
1. You can see that this is no trivial difference of opinion!
 - a. There is a radical antagonism to the cross in an unbeliever.
 - Faith in Christ crucified is at the heart of the distinction between Christians and the sons of this world.
 - b. But why is the opposition to the cross so strong?

- It is strong because it strikes at the root of what we became at the fall.
 - Not only does it expose the wicked and foolish notion that we accepted at the fall: that we should be our own god to ourselves, deciding good and evil...
 - It also declares that what we became is so offensive that it required the very Son of God Himself to come and save us, and that to do that, He had to be cursed on the cross to make atonement.
 - The natural man cannot even admit that he was wrong in the first place to follow the dictates of his own heart by eating the fruit,
 - much less can he admit that he is so wrong and so guilty that the Son of God alone can atone for his sin to reconcile him to God.
 - The cross is offensive. He is an enemy of the cross.
2. Paul himself knows all about his. He had been an enemy of the cross.
- He testifies of his radical conversion to the cross in the first part of this chapter.
 - In 3:4-11 he explains that as a devout Jew, he had completely missed the point of all that God had revealed to Israel. His pride had blinded him.
 - He had used God's revelation of the salvation that He (God) would provide for His people to try to attain salvation by his own efforts.
 - That revelation was designed to show how impossible it is for anyone to meet God's righteous standard that all might rely on Christ, but Paul had taken it as a challenge that he could meet instead of a call to depend on the righteousness that God would provide through His Son.
 - Paul testifies that he was perhaps the most zealous one of all in his efforts. That his credentials and his attainments surpassed those of all of his peers.
 - From the middle of verse 4, he says: **If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.**
 - But now, he has come to see how wrong he was.
 - He counts all of those attainments to be rubbish—dung, in fact.
 - How wrong he was, how arrogant, to think that he could be righteous before Almighty God by such efforts and attainments!
 - In verse 7, he testifies: **But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith...**
- a. Paul's example helps us to understand why the cross is so hated.
- It is hated because it strikes at human pride—the very pride that made us want to put ourselves the place of God to start with and landed us in the place where we need to be saved.

- b. Paul had the highest form of this pride in that he acknowledged God as creator and worthy to be worshipped, and accepted His word as the word of God...
 - But then had the audacity to claim that he himself could do what no one but God could do—make himself righteous in God’s sight.
 - c. All unbelievers hate the cross because they all have this fundamental pride at their core that they need no cross of Christ to save them.
 - Some of them look to find salvation by denying God, by judging Him as not good and as unworthy to be believed in.
 - They will get on better, they say, without such a god as the God of the Bible and the cross.
 - Some will pursue their own morality, some will pursue achievement in sports or business or beauty, some will express their hatred in anger and crime, some will lose themselves in sensuality and drunkenness (they will ‘find the comfort they deserve’ in these things), and many will play the part of the victim who does not deserve to be in this cruel and unfair world—in other words, they are too good for a place like this and God has been unjust to put them here.
 - Their life is a mess, but their moral pride remains because it is not they, but God who has done the greater wrong.
 - That is how they justify themselves.
 - What all have in common is that they are enemies of the cross.
 - There is no greater offense than to be told that they are the problem, so much so, that only the Son of God can save them.
 - The very last thing their pride will let them do is believe that!
 - This is the reason the Bible teaches that no one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws them.
 - This is the reason it teaches that the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God.
 - This is the reason that Jesus said we must be born again, radically transformed by the Holy Spirit and given a new heart to respond to God.
3. My brothers and sisters who believe, if you truly believe, all the glory goes to God.
- It is His grace that exposed your radical need for His salvation and His grace that broke your pride so that you would turn to Christ crucified to save you.
 - Saving faith not only changes your status so that you actually obtain righteousness by Jesus and by Him crucified,
 - it also radically changes your attitude toward God so that you stop pretending to be your own god and lean entirely upon Him.
 - You come down from your moral high horse and you throw yourself upon Christ alone for mercy.
 - How it changes your attitude toward God!
 - Now you love Him and praise Him instead of accusing Him and feeling threatened by Him.

- Embracing the cross brings you into harmony with Him forever. Now you are looking to Him as God instead of striving against Him as another god.

II. Now let's look at the second change. When you come to Christ and become a citizen of heaven, the second radical change is a change in your destination.

A. Your former destiny is described quite pointedly by Paul in verse 19.

- **whose end is destruction, or *perdition*.**
1. The word *end* speaks of the place you are heading—it refers to maturity and completion. Paul used the same word in verse 15 where it is translated, “as many as are *mature*.”
 - Destruction and perdition is what you grow toward apart from the cross of Christ.
 - Whether it is the case that you don't know about the cross at all or that you know much about it and reject it, until you embrace the cross, you are an enemy of it because of what we already saw...
 - And unless you are rescued by the cross, which is the only way you can be saved, you are on the path to perdition—to everlasting destruction.
 - That is where your way will end without Christ.
 - However deluded you may be about your own goodness or intentions, before God, you are a sinner who needs to be saved.
 - It is a hard line, but it is a line that makes the cross all the more essential and all the more powerful and all the more sweet when we accept it.
 2. The reason all are headed for destruction without the cross is because all have sinned.
 - Unless Christ takes away that sin, it remains.
 - And He only takes it away when we come admitting it and admitting that only He can save us.
 - If the sin is not cleansed by Christ, we are entirely unfit to dwell with God and are only fit to be cast into the place of outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.
 - Heaven would not be heaven if sinners were there.
 - There will be cleansed sinners—cleansed by Christ—but there will be no sinners in heaven who have not been cleansed by Him.

B. What a grand thing it is for you who are in Christ that your destiny is now heaven.

1. Though you must remain in this fallen world for a time, and though you still sin, Christ will bring you to glory at last.
 - You are forgiven through faith in Christ crucified, and you stand in His righteousness already, but He has much more to do in you yet.
2. When you die, He will fully eradicate all your sin.
 - You still have much sin in your life and that will be so until the day that you die, but then He will radically alter you the way He did at your conversion when you were born of His Spirit.

- Yes, when you die in Christ, His saving work will eradicate every last vestige of sin.
 - That is your destiny, dear brothers and sisters!
3. And then at the very end—at the last day—when Jesus returns, your body which will be lying in the grave will rise and be perfected.
 - Paul speaks of this in verse 21 where he speaks of the Lord Jesus **“who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.**
 - Along with the transformation of our bodies, there will be the transformation of the heaven and earth.
 - The curse will be lifted from these and they will be whole and wholly serviceable to us again.
 - Beautiful paradise will be restored and we will have the capacity to enjoy it as the revelations of our Father’s handiwork.
- C. There is in us a longing to go home, to go to be with Jesus in glory.
1. Paul speaks about that in this letter back in chapter 1.
 - You may be familiar with it.
 - In 1:19-26, he explains that, as one who may be sentenced to death, he is rather excited, because for him, to die is gain because to die would be to depart and to be with Christ which is far better than staying here.
 - However, he believes that God will keep him for a while longer so he can continue to serve the church, teaching the truth, and leading sinners to repentance.
 - Nevertheless, within him, there is a yearning to go to his true homeland that he obtained when he came to Christ.
 2. Do you have this yearning as a citizen of heaven, eagerly waiting for our Saviour to come?
 - Yes, my brothers and sisters,
 - As a citizen of heaven, you yearn to go home.
 - You have work to do here now, and that work is very important, but you will not be satisfied until you awake in His presence with His likeness.
 - You are moving toward home with each passing day—heaven is at the end of your road.

TRANS> Now let’s look at a third radical difference in those who are citizens of heaven.

III. You have a complete change of gods.

- A. In verse 19, Paul says that the enemies of the cross have their belly as their god.
- **whose god is their belly.**
 - I have already touched on this.
1. The idea here is that until we come to Christ, we follow the passions and desires of our own heart.

- The *belly* speaks of our appetite, our hungers—again, our passions and desires.
2. At the fall, we exchanged gods by putting ourselves in the place of God.
 - Originally, we were created in the image of God and it was our nature to do His will. Our goal was to please Him as our God—as it should have been.
 - But with the fall, Satan said, “You will be as God, knowing good and evil,” and there was this radical shift.
 - Now, when there is a conflict between what would please God and what would please us, we do what pleases us—as if we are god.
 - Sadly, we don’t even recognise how twisted and wicked this is.
 - It is the true cause of all our woes.
 - It is this that disconnects us from a right relationship with God.
 - It is this that makes the cross necessary.
- B. Ah, but here is the good news about this.
1. At the cross, we not only have forgiveness because Christ died for us, but we also, in coming to Him, die with Him and rise to walk as a new creation in Him.
 - Though we are never consistent, at least it is now in us to deny ourselves and to live for God.
 - Instead of following our fleshly desires and passions, we follow Christ.
 - Our desire is that whether we live or die, we would be pleasing to Him.
 2. This is nothing less than a change of gods for us.
 - We who once forsook God to follow our own heart now forsake our belly to follow God. We deny ourselves and put to death our passions and sinful desires.
- C. With a new God, we have a new law.
1. We now desire that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.
 - We desire to obey like the holy angels and like the departed saints who have been perfected.
 2. It is one of the blessings of the new covenant that the Holy Spirit writes God’s law upon our hearts so that we delight to do His will.
 - We grow in our understanding and we become more and more conformed to His ways.
 - We have no other gods before Him, we turn from idols to worship Him as He dictates, we revere His name instead of taking it in vain, we remember the sabbath day to keep it holy, we honour our parents and those in authority, we do not kill, commit adultery, steal, or bear false witness against our neighbour, and, by His grace, we turn from covetousness.
 3. Not that we are perfect, but that now we have God as our God.
 - Paul describes it perfectly in verses 12-14: **Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.** ¹³ **Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and**

reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- We have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires and follow God as our God. We delight to do His will.

IV. A fourth change that comes when we become citizens of heaven is a change in what we glory in or boast in.

A. Speaking of us while we were enemies of the cross, Paul says that our glory was in our shame (see verse 19 again).

1. The idea here is that we found glory in ourselves (or at least tried to), not knowing or admitting that we are full of sin.

- Yes, as those made in God's image, we certainly do have some marvellous abilities and talents—even certain virtues.
 - But because these are all tainted with sin, they call for tears of shame instead of boasting.
 - What makes them especially twisted is this very fact that we glory in them not as gifts from God, but as deriving from ourselves.
 - It is only the sinful part that derives from us.
 - We are defiled and we think we are beautiful.
 - As Paul says, we glory in our shame.

2. Think of it like this.

- A clever thief glories in how clever he is to take for himself what rightly belongs to his neighbour.
 - Perhaps he is so clever that he has found ways to do that without breaking any laws of man—and he glories in what he has done!
- You see people glory in their drunkenness, or glory in their fornication, or boast in their defiance or how they told someone off.
 - Or maybe it is in how they manipulated others.
- But perhaps even worse is the boasting, apart from the cross, in their virtues, in their moral purity and honesty.
 - Is this not what Paul told us he gloried in?
 - And does he not tell us that he now counts it all as dung?
 - He was worse than the boasting thief because he was boasting in righteousness that was not worthy of God as if it *was* worthy.
 - He was glorying in his shame—in what he is now ashamed of—now that he knows the true requirements of God.
 - How could he ever have thought that he was worthy? that he had grounds for boasting before a holy God?
 - The very thought of it is appalling to him now.
 - His works all belong in the refuse pile.

B. We have something so much better to glory in now as citizens of heaven.

1. We glory in our Saviour and in His cross!

- He is the righteous man who is without sin.

- He is the one whose love is like the love of God, only reproduced in man.
 - We glory in His saving work and we glory in His righteous kingdom.
 - We glory in the inheritance of heaven and in the place that He has prepared for us.
 - We glory in His love for the Father and in the Father's love for Him.
2. And in Christ, we see God, and we glory in Him.
- He who created all things out of nothing.
 - He who designed all the beauty and gave us the ability to appreciate it.
 - He who gave us all that we have—and yes, even our abilities that we have from Him to do art and music and science—to love and serve and worship.
 - We glory in Him who created us to be relational, to know Him and to love Him and others.
 - We see His power and His mercy in Christ. We see His wisdom and His grace. We see His wrath and His justice. We see His holiness and His truth.
3. My brothers and sisters, we have something worthy to glory in!
- The world glories in their shame, but we glory in our Maker and Redeemer.
 - We were made to worship, and as citizens of heaven, we have been restored to glory in our God and to enjoy Him forever.
 - We worship Him instead of ourselves.
- V. Now we come to the fifth thing that changes when we become citizens of heaven: Our focus changes from earthly things to heavenly things.**
- A. This is inevitable—now that we are living for God.
- What used to be important to us—our life, our health, our riches, our reputation, our relationships, our status, our accomplishments, our pleasures—
 - all become, at the same time, way less important and way more important.
1. These things become less important inasmuch as they are temporary and inasmuch as we have something so much more important to live for.
- Our treasure is not here anymore—it is in heaven where Christ is.
 - We seek not the things of the earth, but the things of heaven.
2. Yet, these things become more important in that now we have them from God and we want to use them all for His glory.
- We want to honour Him in our relationships and with our possessions and our abilities and our pleasure.
 - We want to have a good name for His sake who redeemed us.
 - We realise that we have only just begun to love our spouse and our children and even our recreations as we ought.
 - But we love these, no longer as idols, but as gifts from our heavenly Father that we use in service to Him—to glorify and enjoy Him.
 - Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we do all for the glory of God.
- B. Paul again serves as an illustration. He shows us what it means to be heavenly minded.
- In this book of Philippians, you can see what it means for a man to have his mind on heavenly things rather than earthly things by looking at Paul.

1. He rejoiced despite serious problems. He looks like a mad man from a worldly perspective.
 - In this letter, he keeps talking about rejoicing in the Lord and about how wonderful it is to be in Christ.
 - But the remarkable thing is, he speaks about this in the middle of all kinds of serious problems.
 - He is in prison.
 - He is under and oppressive government that has put him there.
 - He is possibly on death row.
 - He has jealous colleagues who look at his imprisonment as a chance to bring him down.
 - He has associates in the ministry who are not reliable—only Timothy can really be counted on.
 - He has the circumcision party that is spreading false teaching to his disciples.
 - He realises, as we saw in chapter 3, that all his former attainments are dung.
 - But yet, he is full of rejoicing and praise to God.

2. What is wrong with him? Is he insane?
 - Not in the least. He is very rational because he is a citizen of heaven.
 - He is thrilled with His faithful Saviour who even went to the cross.
 - He is thrilled with His Saviour who gave him a righteous standing in a kingdom that has standards that Paul recognises that he could never have met.
 - But saving sinners in this fallen world required great suffering in this world.
 - Paul knows that to carry out his own role now—which is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus in a fallen sinful world—suffering is required.
 - He knows that suffering is also required in himself and all his brothers to continue our sanctification, that the whole church might learn to serve God rather than their own passions and desires.
 - Paul recognised that all of the streams of his life, including his suffering, converge in Christ and lead to glory.
 - Everything is part of His saving work for him and for all his brothers and sisters who are chosen for salvation.
 - Paul is lapping up all that Christ has for him in this world.
 - He is striving for glory, for resurrection, both for himself and for the elect.

3. He knows in Christ's hands, it doesn't matter if he is in prison or sentenced to death or the victim of envious fellow ministers.
 - All of these things are part of the process of bringing him and the church out of the wilderness of this world to glory.
 - If he is in prison, it is where he will learn of Christ.
 - If he is on death row, that will be his great opportunity to honour Christ and to know Him, and it will convey him to be with Jesus in glory which will be far better.
 - If he suffers from malicious or slack ministers, he has fellowship with Christ in His sufferings.
 - Just as Christ had to suffer to bring us His kingdom in this fallen world, so we are called to suffer to advance His kingdom.

- Every bit of it is to bring us to glory and to make glory greater.

Conclusion: Yes indeed.

- As citizens of heaven, this present world is not our home.
 - Our mind is not set on earthly things—our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.
- My dear friends, where is your citizenship?
 - Is your home only here, or is it heaven where Christ is?