

St. Paul wrote that **“our citizenship is in heaven,”** which is to say, our perspective on life is different than that of the world’s. We have different expectations for our lives; our sense of success is different; we have a different understanding of what family is. This morning we’re going to talk about how our understanding of ourselves as citizens of heaven impacts our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-21: Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. 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. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ 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.

In this reading, Paul gives us two different pictures of life. On the one hand, there are the **“citizens of heaven,”** people who are saved by grace, who believe the Bible, who love Jesus, a people who live their lives fearlessly, in peace, and with hope and joy in the Lord.

On the other hand, there are the people of the world who **“walk as enemies of the Cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things” (vv.18-19).**

These are people who are lost to the things of this world, things which are rooted in man’s natural, ugly, unredeemed cravings. John Chrysostom, a church father, said that such people take “pride in what they ought to conceal. For it is bad enough to do shameful things. But if the doer is ashamed, it is only half so terrible. When, however, someone preens himself on his own shame, that is the extreme of shamelessness.”

We could all sit in a circle, and I'm sure it wouldn't take long for us to create a long list of behaviors which have become common in the world, which we find absolutely unacceptable and abhorrent, mortifying and gross!

But let's take a moment to examine the very nature of Paul's assessment of the world. As we study his words, we learn about what he believed and how he thought. However, we also learn about how he felt, about how he felt in here, in his heart. Indeed, he taught from his head and his heart. Here, he wrote about how as he reflected on the condition of the "**enemies of the Cross**" he remembered them "**with tears.**" He wept for them. He was internally distressed for the eternal condition of people who did not know Jesus as their savior.

This is something for us to keep in mind as we watch the news. It's easy to become angry and even a little self-righteous, shaking our heads in disgust at what we see and hear. But what are we looking at? We're looking at people for whom Christ died too. That's what brought tears to Paul's eyes.

After he painted this dreary picture of the world, he cut to the center piece of his writing, that thing that would make a difference in the lives of the people who would read this letter and cling to his every word. He wrote, "**Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us....** ²⁰ **our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,** ²¹ **who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body (vv.17,20-21).**

Paul was either nuts or extremely confident to write, "**join in imitating me.**" He was just asking for trouble, right, knowing full well that others would put his life under a magnifying glass.

But he wasn't nuts. He was a Christian who knew who he was and to whom he belonged. If someone were to say, Paul, how can you tell us to imitate you when you're a sinner just like the rest of us? He would say, I'm a sinner who's been forgiven by "**the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**" (John 1:29). But imitate me, believing as I do and walking with me with the same confidence.

If someone were to say, Paul, you're not perfect, who're you to judge? He would say, I judge no one, but the one who does judge is coming soon. And I thank my

dear Lord Jesus that he sees me not as you see me, but he sees me cloaked in his own righteousness because of my baptism in his name (Galatians 3:27). Imitate me. Believe this same promise, and together let's walk the talk.

This kind of confidence is God's gift to his children. We know that we aren't perfect, but we do know him who is perfect, and his Spirit lives in us. We know that what we believe is right, for Christ is right, and we belong to him. We know that God loves us, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that whosoever believes in him has eternal life" (John 3:16)**. This was the confidence of St. Paul. This is our confidence as citizens of heaven.

After his conversion to Christianity, Paul's life was a roller coaster. Half the time he was imprisoned and half-starved for publicly sharing his faith. And the other half the time he lived comfortably, lacking nothing. But whether cold and hungry or warm and full, he lived with confidence that his **"citizenship (was) in heaven."**

This was a state of mind and heart for Paul, a condition which rested on three pillars. That's what I want to talk about now: The three pillars which we can commit ourselves too as citizens of heaven. They are our security, our morality, and our identity.

A person's sense of security is his most basic need. Before one thinks about education, retirement, or buying a new car, he wants to be sure he can put food on the table and a roof over his head.

But Jesus said, **"Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin.... if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more *will He clothe* you?... do not keep worrying. ³⁰For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. ³¹But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. ³²Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:27-32).**

Because the Lord's promises are unconditional, a citizen of heaven has perfect security. We have no reason to worry about anything, to fear anyone, or be stressed out about anything. The Scripture promises, **"The Lord is my shepherd; I**

shall not want” (Psalm 23:1). Please say it with me: **“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”**

The second pillar of our heavenly citizenship is morality. That is, we have a moral compass that is true. This does not mean that we are perfect or that we have entirely obliterated sin in our lives. But what it does mean is that we are not confused about what is right and what is wrong. There is no moral ambiguity in our lives. And when we do sin, we know to whom we may turn to be forgiven.

But think about how the world twists itself into knots as it tries to reinvent the morality wheel. Everything is relative. Each person is a free agent, but not to his benefit. Everyone is on his own and must determine his own path, deciding what is right and what is wrong based on his own conscience.

But Jesus said, **“You are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13).** Friends in Christ, it is our call to take a stand, to share what we know is true. That’s what it means to be **“the salt of the earth,”** adding flavor to this tasteless world. “I am the salt of the earth.” Please say it with me: “I am the salt of the earth.”

And the third pillar of our citizenship in heaven is our identity. God tells us in a thousand different ways how much he loves us and cares for us and watches over us with the most vivid imagery. He tells us we are like chicks a mother hen protects, that we are children of our Father in Heaven who loves us so very much, that we are heirs of the throne of Christ and that we shall rule the nations of the world with him, that we are sheep of the Good Shepherd who will protect us, care for us, and lead us.

But what about those for whom Paul sheds tears, the **“enemies of the Cross of Christ”**? They are chameleons. They change identities faster than the weather changes in Southern California. What do you want me to be? I’ll change my sense of identity to be whatever you want me to be if it serves my needs.

But I am a child of God. Please say it with me: “I am a child of God.”

I’m glad there are no chameleons in God’s house this morning. For know how much Jesus loves us, that he suffered for us, that he died for us, and that he rose from the grave for us.

Jesus made our citizenship real before our Father in Heaven, and he's given us these three pillars to help us remember how real it is, the pillars of security, morality, and identity. In him we fear nothing. In him, our lives are anchored in the otherwise turbulent sea of humanity. In him, we know who we are, and nothing can steal that away from us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this week let's look at the world and see it as Paul saw it: Jesus died for this world, the people rejected him, and Paul wept. May our hearts break for the world's brokenness, and let us set aside time in our day to intercede for all people that they may be saved.

This week let us walk with confidence, knowing that the Lord is true, that his Word is alive, and that his Spirit in our hearts has empowered us to live our citizenship today.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.