

“Our Citizenship is in Heaven”

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Philippians 3:12-21

Philippians Sermon Series

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July 4 is our annual day to remember the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia in 1776. The founding of the United States of America is fascinating history. Against all odds, the patriots defeated numerous enemies and obstacles. Though the U.S.A. has never been perfect, I believe it is an honor to be a citizen of this great country. We have much to work through as a nation, but I would not want to trade my citizenship to live in another country. Furthermore, I believe this is the best time in the history of the world to be alive. As a citizen of the world’s greatest nation in his day, Paul leveraged his Roman citizenship for the sake of the gospel when he was arrested. He was on a mission for the Lord. He accomplished amazing things. No one would have blamed him if he had triumphed in his accomplishments, but his focus was forward-thinking. He was running a race and wanted to cross the finish line with a kick. He was not slowing down, quitting, or retiring. As a result, Paul endured tremendous suffering and eventual martyrdom. Yet, nearly 2,000 years later, we are still memorizing his words. THAT is influence.

Those who follow Jesus hold dual **CITIZENSHIP** (our theme this week). One is of human origin and lasts as long as we live. The Lord gives us our second citizenship. That citizenship started when we first believed. It is the place where we go when our first citizenship ends. Because of our second citizenship, we are confident that we cannot lose. Jesus not only came the first time, but we believe He will come again. While no one knows the day of His return, we eagerly await when our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, comes the second time and sets up His kingdom on the new earth.

APPLICATION: Our memory verse is 3:20: *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.* Paul was born a Roman citizen, but there is an even more important citizenship—the one in heaven. Three questions: First, why should we want to be citizens of heaven? Second, how do we become citizens there? Third, how are citizens supposed to live?

Intro: SLIDE #1a **“The Fullness of Time”**

In Galatians 4:4-5, Paul wrote: *But when **the fullness of time** had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* The “fullness of time” included 3 components.

- 1.) Jewish traditions (circumcision, the law, etc.) that was essential to the root of Christianity.
- 2.) Paul wrote in the Greek language and Greek philosophy and culture influenced him.
- 3.) He was a Roman citizen. The “Pax Romana,” the 1,000 years of peace, gave stability and order to a world known for chaos. Paul could travel on Roman roads and use his Roman citizenship for protection and rights that other non-citizens could not enjoy. This happened

several times for Paul, including in Philippi. The Jewish tradition, the Greek language, and the Roman government made it “the fullness of time” for Jesus to come.

Paul used his privilege as a Roman citizen to advance a greater citizenship in heaven

SLIDE #1b **Phil 3:12-21**

SLIDE #2a Paul’s **IDENTITY** ¹² *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* A new creation. Acts 9 tells us how this happened when Saul was on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians and Jesus “seized him.” Paul describes his new identity in 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.* Paul said, “Christ Jesus has made me his own.”

SLIDE #2b **IMPERFECT** ¹³ *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own.* Though Jesus seized him, Paul doesn’t think that he has seized perfection. Though he is a new creation and Jesus is perfect, Paul hasn’t yet arrived in his journey. If we believe we’ve made it, watch out! As Paul said, 1 Cor 10:12 *Anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.* Pride is the worst sin because it keeps us from repentance which keeps us from the Lord. The irony - only by recognizing we are NOT perfect can we reach spiritual maturity.

SLIDE #3a **FOCUS** *But **ONE THING** I do:* It is so easy to lose focus. Keep this mindset.

Jesus’ conversation with “the rich, young ruler” shows His insistence upon focusing upon what is essential. Mark 10:21-22 *And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack **one thing**: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

Jesus also tried to help Martha focus on what was the “good portion” in life, not the non-essentials.

Luke 10:40-42 *But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but **one thing** is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”*

SLIDE #3b **FORGETTING** *what lies behind* Obviously, Paul isn’t forgetting like he had amnesia. He’s actually writing to people he loves and shares such fond memories. But his focus isn’t looking back on accomplishments – though if anyone could ever boast it was him. He was THE Apostle. He authored 13/27 books in the New Testament. He was a theologian. He was the missionary to the Gentiles and founded numerous churches. But he wouldn’t rest on his laurels. His ministry was not a job, it was his life.

SLIDE #4a *and straining **FORWARD** to what lies ahead.* His focus is not the past, but on the future. He is forward thinking. He talks about where he is going not where he has been. He is shifting into a higher gear, not putting it into park, neutral or reverse. It’s “pedal to the metal” for Paul. He has ambition. Winning the first lap is not the same as finishing first. He’s run some

laps, but he's not finished. He has a single-minded focus to reach a particular goal. Paul wants to continue to grow to be more like Christ. He also wants to continue his ministry. He won't retire to sit idly by – he would press on. His future called him to put forth his best effort now. There was ambition. He had an intense desire to continue. His race was not over. Likewise, those of us who have some miles on us aren't called to turn it off and shut it down, but to continue. As is said, *"If you slow down, you go down."*

Jesus described this spirit in the 4th Beatitude: Matthew 5:6 *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."*

SLIDE #4b ¹⁴ *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward **CALL** of God in Christ Jesus.*
We are to
press on. Paul didn't think he had a "job," but he had a call from God.

SLIDE #5a Christian Maturity. He has a positive example: ¹⁵ *Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.* ¹⁶ *Only let us hold true to what we have attained.* ¹⁷ *Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.* This is interesting – on the one hand, Paul says he's not arrived. On the other hand, he says to "imitate him." There is a difference between "maturity" and "perfection."

SLIDE #5b Humble, Hungry, Smart (teachable spirit)

SLIDE #6a Immaturity. He has a negative example. Don't be like this: 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.*

SLIDE #6b His dual citizenship.

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.*

Some people hold dual citizenships in two different countries, but if we are followers of Jesus, regardless of our national status, we are dual citizens, too. We are to set our minds on heavenly, not earthly things.

Has Christ seized you? It may be an event, but it's always a process. Have you seized Him? Learning to love our new Lord and aligning our hearts with His kingdom is what this whole series is about - developing our affections for Christ.