

Live as citizens of heaven **Philippians 3:17-21**

¹⁷ Brothers, join together in imitating me and in paying attention to those who are walking according to the pattern we gave you. ¹⁸ To be sure, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. I told you about them often, and now I am saying it while weeping. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their appetite, and their glory is in their shame. They are thinking only about earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ By the power that enables him to subject all things to himself, he will transform our humble bodies to be like his glorious body.

Are you a happy person? Do you maintain a positive outlook in life? When trouble or hardship enter your life, do you let it get you down? Or do you look at each setback as a wonderful opportunity your Lord is giving you to trust him more? If there ever was a person who kept a positive outlook in life, it was the Apostle Paul. Paul knew trouble. Be it persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword, Paul experienced it all. The Scripture before us is part of Paul's Spirit-inspired letter to Christians living in the ancient city of Philippi. Paul brought the gospel to Philippi on his second mission journey. And while in Philippi, Paul had to unjustly spend a night in jail there. Now Paul is imprisoned in Rome and he's awaiting trial. He's well aware this his trial might end in his own execution. So you'd think Paul might be a little down. But we don't hear that, not in this letter. Paul had this to say about dying, *"Yes, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to go on living in the flesh, that will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet which should I prefer? I do not know. I am pulled in two directions, because I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far"* (Philippians 1:21-23). Paul carries a joyful tone throughout this letter. Listen to what he says in chapter 4: *Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again: Rejoice!* (4:4). How could Paul stay so positive when everything around him looked so bleak? Paul maintained a proper perspective. To Christians living in Corinth, Paul wrote, *"We are not discouraged. But even if our outer self is wasting away, yet our inner self is being renewed day by day. Yes, our momentary, light trouble produces for us an eternal weight of glory that is far beyond any comparison. We are not focusing on what is seen, but on what is not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal"* (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). Paul always stayed focused on what he could see only through the eyes of faith. And Paul reminded believers in Philippi to do the same. In this Scripture before us, Paul warned the Philippians not to get lost on earthly thinking. Instead he reminds them to look ahead to glory. Paul urges his readers, including you and me today, to live as citizens of heaven.

Paul did not want his readers to get lost in worldly thinking. While imprisoned in Rome, Paul was overjoyed to hear how his Christian brothers and sisters in Philippi were surviving without him. Paul sends this encouragement: *Join together in imitating me and in paying attention to those who are walking according to the pattern we gave you.* Paul had set a wonderful example to follow with his life of faith. Paul always looked to Jesus for forgiveness. He turned to Jesus and found the sure hope of eternal life in heaven. This was his through his Savior's suffering, death, and resurrection. Paul was then overjoyed to hear that many of the

Philippian Christians were doing the same. They didn't cower when persecution came their way. They kept growing in faith. They kept living their faith. They even share their faith. Paul rejoiced that they didn't get lost on earthly thinking.

But that didn't mean there was no threat to their lives of faith. Paul writes, "*To be sure, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. I told you about them often, and now I am saying it while weeping. Their end is destruction, their god is their appetite, and their glory is in their shame.*" Not everyone in Philippi was following Paul's example. Some in Philippi worshipped anything that filled their bellies. They sought only what satisfied bodily cravings. They showed little concern for their spiritual life. Paul calls them enemies of the cross of Christ. Not only did they put no trust in a crucified Christ, they tempted others to lose their faith as well. And sadly what they gloried in, would result in shame. When Jesus returns to judge humanity, they will hear those damning words: "*Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matthew 25:41). Their only goal is to get ahead in this life. They give no thought to life after this world. Paul warned the Philippian Christians not to get caught up with that crowd. He urges them not to get lost on earthly thinking, so that they'd lose sight of their heavenly goal. Instead, they were to live as citizens of heaven.

Isn't it wonderful to escape the world for a while? Here in God's house we get to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to his saving word. We once again were able to unload our guilt and be forgiven of every wrong. Here we get to enjoy fellowship with one another and with God himself. We'll taste his love in a holy supper. We sing his praises and we leave with his blessing. But then we're back out into the world. We get bombarded by bills that sap our bank accounts. They may leave us wondering if God really is going to provide. We get stressed by deadlines that steal time from our family. And when are we ever going to find adequate time for prayer and the study of God's Word. We become suffocated by our world. It's temptations and sinful pleasures drown us daily. We don't have to get too far into the week to find that God is not our top priority. We'll be sure to be in church next week to give our full allegiance to him. But do you think God will be satisfied with just one hour per week. He's a jealous God, remember? He plays second string to no one or nothing. He doesn't just want the best you can give him. He demands perfection. Anything less is unacceptable. Anything less merits his eternal punishment. Living as citizens of heaven cannot happen when you're lost in earthly thinking.

Paul did not want his readers to get caught in earthly thinking. He didn't want any of them to become enemies of the cross of Christ. Instead, he reminds them to look ahead to the glory that is their's. Paul writes, "*But our citizenship is in heaven. We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.*" Philippi was a retirement community for soldiers in the Roman army. One could enjoy life as a citizen of Philippi. But Paul reminds the Christians living there that they had even greater retirement planned for them. As citizens of heaven they could enjoy thoughts of their eternal home because of the Savior who was coming to take them there. That Savior was returning because of the kingdom he had established in his first mission on this planet. How many of these veterans or their fathers were on duty when Caesar Augustus called for a census. They made sure people traveled safely to their hometowns in

an orderly way. That's when our Savior entered our world. But his young life was in danger when King Herod sought to slaughter him. It took a visit from a faithful member of the army of God to warn Joseph to escape to Egypt until it was safe to return.

When he grew up and began his ministry, his life was not easy. Starving for forty days he had to battle Satan and deflect all his flaming arrows. In his weakened condition he successfully wielded the sword of the Spirit and drove off Satan. Throughout his ministry he defeated Satan by driving out demons and winning souls for the Lord. And when the ultimate showdown came, he had to endure ruthless treatment by Roman soldiers, who whipped him mercilessly, crowning him with skull piercing thorns and mocking him. But he didn't fight back. He didn't resist in anyway. He willingly went to die a death he did not deserve. With Romans, Jewish leaders, and his own people were against him, he willingly endured it all asking his Father to forgive them. But far worse treatment came when his heavenly Father punished him for the sins of us all. This was the only way our righteous could punish sin without punishing us. We needed a substitute to take our place. And to cover a whole world of sin, it would take God's Son to suffer God's punishment for us all. And God was satisfied. While soldiers were guarding his tomb to make sure no one stole his lifeless body, God brought him back to life. No one was going to prevent it. He won the victory over sin, death, and Satan. For forty days he showed his victory by appearing to his followers. Then he was welcomed home to heaven. Because Jesus entered our world to save us, we now have citizenship in heaven.

Paul reminds his readers that our heavenly citizenship is better than anything this world brings. Paul writes, *"We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. By the power that enables him to subject all things to himself, he will transform our humble bodies to be like his glorious body."* Our Savior had power to destroy every enemy and bring everything under his control. With that same power he will return to change every believer. Our sinful bodies do waste away until they die and return to dust. But when Christ returns on the Last Day he will return in glory and raise us up. He'll do something special to our bodies. He'll change them so they're fit for eternal life. The Old Testament believer named Job looked forward to that day in faith. In his lowly state he boldly confessed: *"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the end of time he will stand over the dust. Then, even after my skin has been destroyed, nevertheless, in my own flesh I will see God. I myself will see him. My own eyes will see him, and not as a stranger"* (Job 19:25-27). Paul told the Corinthians, *"That is the way the resurrection will be. What is sown is perishable; it is raised imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised as a spiritual body"* (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Glorified bodies await all who eagerly wait for our Lord's return. Glory awaits all who live as citizens of heaven.

So just like the Apostle Paul, though he was imprisoned in Rome, we too have reason to rejoice. And it makes no matter what this life throws at us. We know a much better life awaits. That life is promised and won by our Savior, who went to battle for us all and didn't leave this world until he won forgiveness for every sin and a room in paradise for every soul. As we wait for our Savior's return, let us live our lives filled with joy for the glory that is ours in Christ.