

New Testament – Philippians 3:17-4:1

<sup>17</sup> Brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> join in imitating me and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. <sup>18</sup> For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction; their God is the belly, and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship<sup>[b]</sup> is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup> He will transform the body of our humiliation<sup>[c]</sup> that it may be conformed to the body of his glory,<sup>[d]</sup> by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. **4** <sup>1</sup> Therefore, my brothers and sisters,<sup>[e]</sup> whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

### CITIZENS OF HIS KINGDOM STAND FIRM

Philippians 3:17-4:1

By Rev. Clarence G. Page

What thoughts come to you when you hear “citizen or citizenship”? I wonder whether you think about where you live, the surroundings, the atmosphere, and the peace. We all live in a community we appreciate, I assume, and we have neighbors with whom we interact and engage from time to time. As citizens, we seek to build and maintain relationships. We strive to interact with the person across the street, down the road, and on another street. Being a citizen, of course, means more than living in a community. Citizenship is living in a city, state, and country where we are born and live day in and day out. We become citizens when we are born in a particular place or have legally received the right to citizenship. A citizen isn’t only a resident but loves their city, state, and country and seeks to be a good steward and do justly and live peaceably with everyone. Our citizenship is essential because it identifies who we are and why we exist as people and individuals, forming existence, identity, and community. Steve Massey, the pastor at Hayden Bible Church in Hayden, Ohio, says, “Christians have a biblical

mandate to be exemplary citizens; it's a key part of our ability to show the nature of Jesus Christ to our countrymen." So, today, our message focuses on having citizenship with Jesus Christ.

In our Scripture text found in Philippians, Apostle Paul talks about citizenship, not citizenship here on earth, but from a spiritual perspective. He talks about preparing to be citizens in heaven. He says, our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." He speaks with much compassion, even in tears, hoping that the believers in Philippi would receive understanding and would continue in the faith. He expresses a heartfelt intention about having citizenship in heaven. The believers in Philippi, Jews, and Gentiles were going through persecution by those who didn't believe in Jesus. Those anti-believers, anti-Christians, were confronting the people because they weren't living according to the standards of the Jewish laws and were following Jesus. The believers were condemned and judged constantly, but that didn't deter nor hinder Paul's mission. Paul had a firm conviction in Jesus. Being convinced by his faith, he openly expressed it to the believers. Paul asked the people to model themselves after him or imitate him. He knew the believers must stay on the course in their faith and relationship with Jesus Christ despite the persecution and condemnation.

More importantly, Paul wanted the believers to be faithful and fruitful disciples living as citizens of the heavenly king as witnesses. When he spoke about citizens of heaven, Paul is referring to what? What do you think? Is he talking about having a personal relationship with the Lord? Paul's desire is for everyone to know the Lord so they can live in his kingdom forever and ever. We know heaven is where all believers will dwell in the last days or the Parousia, also known as the Second Coming of the Lord. The Second Coming is a promise made to us by Jesus Himself. Jesus once said, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have

told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

As we hear these words, we understand that Jesus is referring to the heavenly kingdom. So, what are the requirements to go there? What do we need to do today to receive this promise? To be citizens of this heavenly place where many rooms are will be prepared for us, we must meet certain specific requirements. First, we must become believers of the Word and seek a personal relationship with the Lord. Yes, we should have some private time with Jesus. We should want to make a personal choice to be his disciple. I like to hear this song, says, “I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to make Jesus my choice.” Sometimes, we need to confess our wrongs or our falling from God and ask for forgiveness. And secondly, there should come a time when we should pray, pray a prayer of confession and do it fervently. Yes, we gather for worship and pray a prayer of confession, and this is a good thing, a loving thing, but we shouldn’t wait until Sunday to ask forgiveness. We should ask for forgiveness on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Forgiveness shouldn’t occur only on Sunday. Amen! We must admit we all have done some wrong. We all have some shortcomings. But God’s grace is sufficient, says Paul. I know I need some grace, and I need some mercy. What about you? I am glad to know that God is always good and an on-time God.

Preparing for citizenship in heaven is what we are about, and it begins each day, every day, not tomorrow, not next month, but now. The heavenly kingdom is about a transformation to be Christlike. Paul spoke about transforming into a glorious body. He told this to the Jewish Christians, and the Gentiles to empower them to continue the work of Christ. Paul said, “He (Jesus) will transform the body of our humiliation<sup>[c]</sup> that it may be conformed to the body of his

glory....” Doesn’t this sound wonderful, “He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory,” the glory of Jesus Christ? Yes, this is fantastic news for us today. From time to time, we go through the unwanted experience of humiliation. We go through mistreatment and are taken advantage of or not respected by someone, unpleasantly treating us. The Jewish and Gentile Christians experienced this all the time, going through persecution in the name of Jesus. Being accused of ignoring the Jewish laws and being scorned, they were determined to keep the faith and were willing to endure harsh treatments by the Agnostics, the self-righteous Jewish folk who didn’t believe in Jesus and didn’t accept him as being of God and from God.

What is interesting about the heavenly kingdom is that in our relationship with God, we will be just like Jesus. One day we will have a glorious body just like him. Paul recognized this glorious body as a body that will never be in pain nor suffering. We will be free of all kinds of humiliation. Yes, all believers will live in a new body, a heavenly body free from all forms of suffering. As Paul encouraged the Philippians to be steadfast and unmovable in their faith and relationship in Christ, so must we be faithful. Temptations and trying moments will come and go, and we must look beyond ourselves and look to Jesus as the source of strength and our hope for tomorrow. I don’t know about you, but I believe Jesus will come to my rescue. I think he can and will deliver me the bondage of sin and death. Jesus is our victor. He received the victory over sin and death for us, so can we. We have the victory because we are citizens of his kingdom, and we must stand firm in our faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Let’s claim the victory we have in our Lord, in his heavenly kingdom. Amen and Amen.