

Theme: Citizens of Heaven

Text: Philippians 3:12-21 (EHV)

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus also took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it yet, but there is one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Therefore, let all of us who are mature continue to think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this to you too. ¹⁶ Only let us think the same thing and walk in line with what we already have attained. 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.

When I first moved to Texas to serve my first congregation after I graduated from seminary I was asked a number of times, "Where are you from?" I guess I didn't sound much like a native Texan! Most could probably have guessed that I'm from the Midwest, but I remember at least one person telling me they thought I sounded like I was from Canada! "Canada? What are they talking about, eh?" (in Canadian accent ☺). I don't think the person who said that to me had ever been north of Oklahoma, or had ever heard a Canadian speak before, and obviously didn't know the difference between a Michigan accent and a Canadian accent. Besides that, I didn't want people to think I was from a different country. I'm proud to be an American! I'm proud to have been born and raised in the United States. You probably are too! We like to take pride in our roots; pride in where we're from. We like to take pride in our town, our state, and our nation. In a spirit of patriotism above all we call ourselves "Americans." We are citizens here. This is our homeland.

Or is it? We'll learn something today that contradicts that thought. You're going to hear that even though you may have been born and raised in the United States, even now you are **Citizens of Heaven**.

Through Christ you belong in heaven. You have a home waiting for you there, and since that is true you can look forward to going home there. The best is yet to come. Your glory and your hope are in the future, they are not found in a yearning for the past. Paul says in our text, **"Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it yet, but there is one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead" (v.13).**

There are times when we desire to return to the "good old days," but there really is no such thing. Whatever time period you consider the "good old days" those days did not always look so good when they were the present. At any given time of our lives we can often be found looking for something different; something better. The fact is that we will never find complete satisfaction on earth. That is true whether you're married or single, rich or poor, educated or not. Sin is always going to get in the way of complete satisfaction.

Our lack of fondness for the present and the restlessness that we have should not be surprising because we are away from home. Even the very body you have is temporary housing (a **"tent"** - **2 Corinthians 5:1**) compared with the mansion that you will possess in the life to come. As a Christian you can be happy and can find satisfaction in the life that the Lord has given you, but always keep in mind that it will get much better.

It is impossible to imagine just how good it will be because we just cannot comprehend what life will be without sin. **Revelation 7:16-17** gives us an idea of what life will be like in heaven by telling us what will *not* be there. **“They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”** Without sin there will be no pain, no sadness, no sickness, no bad feelings, no bad “things” at all.

But how do you get there? Eternal life with God is a prize that has been won for us by Christ. Paul writes in the first verse of our text, **“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” (v.12)**—namely, heaven! Christ went the way of the cross; lowering Himself that we may one day be glorified. In His life of obedience to the Law He met God’s standards of perfection for us. By His death on the cross, He not only removed our sin and its guilt, He also took away the power that sin has over us. In His resurrection He defeated death itself. The prize for all of Christ’s work is everlasting life, which He freely shares with us. Nothing is more valuable than the prize of heaven because it lasts forever. God has given you a place to call home, where you will live with Him for eternity.

Going home, then, is what we all look forward to, what we are striving for. As Paul states in our text: **“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (v.14)** God in His grace has rescued you and put you onto the path to heaven. He has changed your direction so that now you have a future with Him instead of eternal separation without Him. Now you know that the earth is not your true home, the United States is not your true citizenship, but rather you have a home in heaven and citizenship in His Kingdom! When God sees fit, He will bring you *home*.

You are on the right path, but the key is staying on that path all the way home. There are going to be choices every day as to how you’re going to spend your time, with whom you’re going to spend time, and what exactly you’re going to do. Are you going to listen to the leading of God’s Spirit through His Word? Or are you going to be led by your sinful flesh and the temptations of the sinful world around you? This will be a constant struggle for you as long as you live.

When you are faced with choices in behavior or lifestyle, you will find your guidance in the Bible. Now, of course, God does not address every specific situation in His Word. However, you will find that in situations which you’ll encounter that God has given you *principles* which you can apply and put into practice. These principles are laid out clearly for us in the Bible, and God will point you in the right direction.

Paul also warns us in our text that there will be those who do not “walk,” or live a life focused on heaven. Far from it! Many “walk,” or live, a life that is focused on earthly things. At times they are going to tempt you and try to lead you off the path of righteousness and off the path to heaven. **“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” (v. 18).** Paul tells us In verse 19 that **“Their end is destruction, their god is their appetite, and their glory is in their shame. They are thinking only about earthly things.” (v. 19).** Sound familiar? We see this all around us, don’t we? And we have to admit that we seen it inside of us at times in our lives as well: Setting our minds on earthly things. Believing that this is our true home, and that the “be all and end all” to our life is right here in *this* life.

Instead of following them, Paul encourages us, **“Brothers, join together in imitating me and in paying attention to those who are walking according to the pattern we gave you” (v.17).** More often than not we like to use fellow Christians for an *excuse* and imitate their sinful behavior. But Paul reminds us that we can look also to see how a fellow Christian handled a situation properly and follow their example. This verse should also remind us of the importance of being around like-minded Christian acquaintances and friends so that we can actually *be* influenced by their attitudes and behavior and follow their example. Best of all, of course, we can look to Jesus’ perfect example. The Bible tells us, **“Let us keep our eyes fixed**

on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal.” (Hebrews 12:2 - EHV).

Remember your goal of heaven and life with Christ and then live as one who is going there. Your path should match the goal. The key is to remember where you truly belong. It's not here on this earth. You are **Citizens of Heaven!** As such your walk here on earth will look very different than those who are tied to the things of the earth. You are in the world, but not of the world. Heaven is your true home. We're not truly home until God takes us there, and He will make this change for us. As Paul writes in the last two verses of our text, **“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” (v. 20-21).**

On the day that Jesus returns, or when He says to us one by one, “It is time,” we will go home to heaven. That is where your citizenship is! You're just on a visit here—a temporary visa. You're only passing through. One day your body will go where your citizenship already is. You can look forward to that day with great joy and anticipation. In the meantime, live as one whose home is above. Have the attitude which we read in our text: **“Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it yet, but there is one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (v.13-14).** Let's press on toward that goal, dear brothers and sisters in Christ—fellow citizens of heaven! The best is yet to come! Amen.