

Sermon 3/17/19 Looking forward in Christ Philippians 3:14-4:1

Dear Citizens of Heaven:

Do you ever find yourself living in the past? How often do you just sit back and remember the “good old days”? There is something to be said about remembering the past. We have museums and events and living history displays that help us remember the past.

- In Williamsburg, Virginia one will be reminded of colonial America as one may visit a section of the town where they bring back that time period with people who are in the dress and mindset of 1776 Virginia.
- Civil War reenactors dress in uniform of Union and Confederate armies of the 1860’s war between the states as they reconstruct battles of that time.
- My family would often visit Fort Clinch State Park while living in Florida where on special weekends Union and Confederate soldiers would camp out in tents and relive the year 1864. One time they even had an Abraham Lincoln impersonator who was there visiting the troops.
- If you are a student of history these events can make history come alive.

And on a personal note there are times we like to as individuals remember the good times of the past with our families and friends.

- We remember reunions and wedding celebrations
- We remember school achievements and graduation ceremonies
- We remember celebrating special birthdays and wedding anniversaries

In some respects it is good to remember the past.

But today, the Apostle Paul encourages us to look forward to the future. As we live here and now in this world, Paul calls us to look forward to the future. Why?

I. Because our names are on heaven’s record and we will stand firm in the Lord

v20 Our citizenship is in heaven

A. Our names are written in the Book of Life

* Revelation 20:12ff “Another book was opened which is the Book of Life. If anyone’s name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

* Luke 10:20 “However..rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Citizenship is important.

- The citizens of Philippi to whom Paul wrote this letter were privileged to be Roman citizens. When a baby was born in Philippi, it was important that its name be registered on the legal records of the city. When the sinner becomes a believer through water and the word his or her name is written in the Book of Life.
- Paul speaks of his friends this way: “Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.” Philippians 4:13

Citizenship is important. When you travel abroad you have a passport that identifies you as a citizen of this or that nation. Could you imagine not being a citizen of anyplace?

Philip Nolan in the story The Man Without a Country was sentenced to live aboard a ship for 56 years and was buried at sea because he cursed the name of his country. He never heard or saw his homeland again. But we have a home. We have a place where we are called citizens.

B. Through the blood of Christ we have our names on the record.

Jesus says: “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.” Matthew 10:32

We are citizens of heaven...

II. Because we have a heavenly mindset and will stand firm in the Lord

Paul speaks of people who are not citizens of heaven in v19 “Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.”

The unbeliever does not understand the things of God. The unbeliever doesn't understand God's Word. The Bible says:

“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” I Corinthians 2:14-16

The person who doesn't understand God's Word doesn't understand us. They don't understand why we believe that God...

- created the world in six days as opposed to their belief in evolution
- will keep this world going until He comes back as opposed to their belief in man-made destruction of the world
- owns everything we have – our possessions, our money, our lives as opposed to their belief that what they have is theirs to use as they desire.
- desires that we worship Him and follow His will as opposed to their belief that there is no God to whom they are accountable to and they can live any way they so desire
- became Man and took our sins to the cross when Jesus died as opposed to their belief that Jesus was simply a great teacher but not God in the flesh
- gives us the free gift of eternal life in heaven as opposed to their belief that life after death is not a certainty or perhaps comes about in the form of reincarnation.
- calls us daily to repent of our sins as opposed to their belief that there is really no such thing as sin

We believers speak a different language than the world. The Apostle John wrote: “They (unbelievers) are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us.” I John 4:5-6

As citizens of heaven we enjoy...

- worship and praising our Lord and talking about spiritual things

- Bible Study and serving the Lord with our time, talents, treasure and testimony
- giving and sharing

Our mind and our heart belongs to the Lord and our mouth will reflect this as Paul writes;

- Colossians 4:6 “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”
- Ephesians 4:29 “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

If you read verse 19 from a believers viewpoint it would go like this: “Our destiny is not destruction but eternal life in heaven. Our god is not our stomach but Jesus the Lord of our life. Our glory is not in shame but in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.”

We are citizens of heaven

III. Therefore we followers of God’s servants as we stand firm in the Lord

Note what Paul says in v17:

“Join with others in following my example...and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.”

What example did Paul give us? What pattern are we to follow?

- Paul lived to give, not get
- Paul lived to love, not hate
- Paul lived to serve, not rule
- Paul lived to give Christ the glory, not himself
- Paul lived as a stranger in this world, not as a citizen of this sinful world
- Paul lived finding life in Jesus, not in his own works for salvation
- Paul daily confessed his sins calling himself the “chief of sinners”

- Paul says follow my example...

Paul was concerned about people. He desired that people would believe in Jesus. He speaks in v18 of his sorrow over those who live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Paul weeps over unbelievers and over those who have gone astray. Paul wept for his own people the Jews who had as a group rejected Jesus as their Savior.

- Romans 10:1 “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.”
- Romans 9:2 “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart...For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers...the people of Israel.”
- May we have the same desire for the lost....all of us here probably know someone who is lost at this very moment in our circle of family, friends or neighbors.
- We care about them because we are citizens of heaven.

We are citizens of heaven and stand firm in the Lord.

IV. And we are looking forward to Jesus’ return and the transformation of our earthly bodies

We are anticipating Jesus’ return. Paul says we “eagerly await” the Lord’s return. The word means one who stands on his tip toes looking down the road in anticipation of something coming. Jesus’ return is a powerful motive for us to live for Him.

We know the Lord could return at any moment. May we be found faithful to Him and ready to receive Him when He returns.

We are looking forward. We are looking for that time when our frail old sinful bodies are transformed into a glorious physical heavenly body. When Jesus comes back to this earth and if we are still walking around the Bible says “...we will be changed --- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye...” I Corinthians 15:51f

If we are already in heaven when Jesus' returns we will be coming back with him to this earth and our bodies will rise from the ground as it says: "For the trumpet **will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be** changed." I Corinthians 15:52

We are citizens of heaven and we will stand firm in the Lord. Paul says stand firm in the Lord and live under the control of the Lord Jesus.

Living with an eye on the future as a citizen in heaven we will...Live under His rule, spend our time in His work and pray for His kingdom to come.