

LIVING AS CITIZENS OF HEAVEN in a Broken World – Part 1  
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## LIVING AS CITIZENS OF HEAVEN IN A BROKEN WORLD – PART 1

Tonight and next week, we're going to be in the book of Philippians in chapter 1. In this room this evening is probably a pretty good mixture of church histories, and what I mean by that is the history that you have in church. Some of us have been in church our entire lives, your childhood, your adulthood are filled with experiences with the people of God, and this is my story.

All of my adult life I've been in church, and maybe that's your story as well, that you've been involved in church to different degrees. But for others, maybe you came to know the Lord in your adult life, that later on in life you came to know the Lord, and that's when you got involved in church life. Maybe for you today, this is your first time ever stepping in a church, and if that's you this evening, we want to say we're so grateful and we're thrilled that you're here.

But even in that mixture of histories, there's a couple of things about church that I think that we could all agree on. It is really sad when a church doesn't look how she should. It's a really, really sad thing. I don't know if there's something quite as tragic as when a church looks nothing like Jesus has declared her to be. And I don't know if you've ever experienced this in your history of church. I imagine if we went around the room this evening, you would be able to share sad moments and memories of your experience in church, where the church didn't look how Jesus has declared her to be.

Things that you've experienced, maybe even things that you've contributed to, that there's been division over things that should not divide the body of Christ, behaviour that has gone on that should not be named among the people of Christ, or maybe even a lifelessness to church that shouldn't be present among the people who have been made alive in Christ. When a church has so abandoned who she is that it's unrecognizable, that's one of the most tragic things. That Jesus has declared His church to be like this and to make her a certain way, there's nothing more tragic than when a church doesn't look like that.

And then on the other side, there is nothing quite as beautiful as when a church is living faithfully into what Jesus has declared her to be. When a church is imperfectly but faithfully who she is supposed to be. Charles Spurgeon famously called the church "the dearest place on earth." And hear me this evening, we are far from perfect. We have our flaws. We are all sinners in need of grace but, we are imperfectly trusting the Lord together.

So, if I asked the room this evening, regardless of your history in church, do you want to be part of a church that is faithfully living into what Jesus has called her to be, I don't think we would have to really think about that question. I think we would all want that, wouldn't we? We want to be part of

something that's good and that's true and that's beautiful as a church. And here's what we need to know.

Every single one of us plays a role in that. We all contribute to that kind of ecclesiological vision. And for those of you who call this church home, I want us to consider this evening from Philippians chapter 1, what that means and what God has called us to here as a church. What Jesus has declared us to be, what Jesus has declared to be true about us, and what we are trying to faithfully live as the people of God.

And so, here is the title and the big idea of this evening's message. Living As Citizens of Heaven In A Broken World. And one author put it this way, the church is a colony of heaven in a country of death. A colony of heaven in a country of death. And so, the dream here at Cedarview for as long as God gives us is to faithfully live into our identity as citizens of the kingdom and as a colony of heaven. And so, we're going to be in Philippians chapter 1 starting in verse 27.

***“Just one thing: As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel, [28] not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your salvation—and this is from God. [29] For it has been granted to you on Christ’s behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, [30] since you are engaged in the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I have.” (Philippians 1:27 – 30)***

So, we're reading this evening from the CSB, and I want to explain why we're doing that. Verse 27, here in Philippians chapter 1, makes a clean break from the autobiographical tone of the earlier section that Paul writes in this letter.

And it's as if, at this point, Paul has taken the spotlight off of his own life, and now he's shifting the book, shifting the letter to the Philippians. Paul is saying, enough about me, I want to talk about you now. And I want you to catch this one thing.

That first word, if you have the ESV or the New King James, that first word reads, “only”, “only let your life, your conduct...” It's the Greek word “monos” which, if you're translating word for word, there's really only one way to translate that. It's “only.” But a better translation, and I think this is where the CSB gets it right, a more accurate translation to what Paul is trying to communicate is this phrase, “Just one thing.”

Paul is saying there is one overarching thing, there is the bottom line that sums up everything I'm trying to tell you in this letter. We don't need to talk about your Christian doctrine. I am concerned about your Christian life, your life lived worthy of the gospel of Christ.

That is the bottom line. This is what Paul is saying. Now, that first sentence that we read, again, if you were to read it in the ESV, it reads as, “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel.”

And this is where I think the CSB gets it right again and commentators of Scripture pick up on this. The Greek word used here in some translation as manner of life or as conduct is one Greek word, *politeuomai*. (Poly-two-a-my).

*Politeuomai*. Now, when you hear me say that, you might hear the root word in there, poli, which speaks to politic or polis, which refers to city. This phrase literally means live as worthy citizens. And so, that's why the CSB says live as citizens of heaven. This is no doubt what Paul is talking about.

There are four places in the New Testament where Christians are called citizens of heaven. And one of those places is here in Philippians 1.27. And to understand what Paul is saying, we need to understand how the Philippian Christians would have heard this, which means this evening I need to catch you up on a little bit of history about the city of Philippi.

We get a description of Philippi in Acts chapter 16, verse 12. Paul is going to this city as part of his missionary journeys, and it says this in Acts chapter 16. ***“Philippi, a Roman colony and a leading city of the district of Macedonia.”*** Philippi was a Roman colony. Now, you might ask this evening, what does that mean? That's a great question.

Here's what happened. Philippi was a large city in Greece, and a man by the name of Octavian, who would later be given the title Augustus, he would become the first Caesar of the Roman Empire. And Octavian, in his time in leadership, won a few battles on the plains of Philippi just outside of the city.

And those victories helped Octavian become Caesar of all of Rome. And really, these victories, they helped him transition Rome from a republic to an empire so that Octavian would actually become the first of several Caesars. To thank the people of Philippi who fought for him on the plains, he allowed them to settle in the city of Philippi and declared Philippi to be a Roman colony in around 30 BC.

You might hear all of that and say, so what? Here's why that matters. Of the entire Roman Empire, only about 15% of people had citizenship. And yet the entire city of Philippi was granted citizenship. Not all cities in the empire were considered colonies, and yet Philippi had this distinct privilege. Now, here's what it meant to be a Roman colony.

There was a Roman law, and in Latin, it's pronounced like this, *Ius Italicum* (E-oos Italia-coom). This law gave certain cities all of the legal privileges of the land. That even though it's not Rome, it is treated as Rome. Rome is in Italy. Philippi is in Greece. There's about 800 miles between the two cities. But being a Roman colony brought these two cities together. Being a Roman colony made Philippi Roman soil, and as a Roman colony, it granted the residents of Philippi, Roman citizenship.

If you're a resident at the time of Philippi, and now you've become a Roman citizen, it means that you can own land, that you're exempt from certain taxes, you can buy and sell property, you can enter into contracts, you can do business, you have right to a fair trial. You are now protected by Rome, the largest empire in the history of the world, and you get all of these privileges as well.

And in exchange for that, you live in a place that's not Rome, but is a representation of Rome. And because of that, you are now called to be loyal to Caesar. At the time that the letter of Philippians was written, they were calling Caesar, Lord of Lords, and the Son of God. These were common titles given to people in leadership.

So you didn't just offer Caesar your loyalty, you offered Caesar your worship. Now, with all that being said, imagine that you live in a place like that, and imagine how much that shaped your view of the world. You would live in that city every single day thinking of Rome. "I am not in Rome, but I live in a colony that makes my city Roman soil. I am a citizen of Rome. I live 800 miles away from Rome, but I live in light of the realities that are happening there."

Maybe the best comparison that we have to this today is that if you are an Canadian citizen working in a Canadian embassy on foreign soil. Now, there are almost 145 embassies in the world according to a quick internet search, so please don't fact check me on that. They are in a foreign place, and they are governed by Canada for the interests of Canada. And if you were employed there and you lived at one of these embassies, even though you're not in Canada, so much of your life would be dictated and shaped not by the land that you're in, but by the one that you belong to, ie Canada.

And so Paul writes to the church in this Roman colony, many of whom would be Roman citizens. Remember, the church is likely meeting in the living room of a woman, a wealthy woman named Lydia. And Paul says this, he says, "**As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ.**" Paul's saying this, he's saying, you know what it's like to live life according to Caesar and as a colony of Rome, but your deeper identity and your higher calling is as citizens of the King and as a colony of heaven.

So what does that mean? If you're new to church this evening, what does it mean to live as a citizen of King Jesus? That's a great question. Here's what happened. Jesus of Nazareth, who is a rabbi, a prophet, a healer, a son, and a brother. Jesus, who is the Son of God, came to earth. He took on flesh. He was kind to the vulnerable. He was merciful to sinners. And he was completely faithful to God, his Father, and full of the Spirit. He was entirely without sin.

And around 33 AD, he was arrested by the Roman Empire. He was falsely accused. He was tragically betrayed. He was mercilessly beaten and he was unjustly crucified. They buried him in a borrowed tomb outside of Jerusalem. And in that tomb and with his rising from the grave, Jesus won the greatest battle against Satan, sin, and death.

And he rose again, vindicating every word that he had ever said about himself, claiming that he was God, and proving that he is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. And then Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father. And right now, Jesus is ruling and reigning over heaven and earth. And as the resurrected King of heaven and earth, he is establishing his reign right now on earth.

When the Bible talks about heaven, it's not simply talking about a location that you go to when you die. But it is the space where God dwells without any sort of resistance. It's why Jesus tells us to pray, "**Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**" Heaven is everything that

earth was supposed to be and everything that earth will one day be when Jesus returns and reunites heaven and earth. Heaven is where there's no violence, there are no tears, no sickness, there's no idolatry, there's no sin, there's only worship and peace and wholeness and the uninterrupted joy of God's presence.

And when Jesus rose and now as he reigns, he is establishing that heavenly kingdom on earth. So you might ask this evening, maybe you're new to church, who gets to be a part of that? All who have been granted citizenship by the King. And Jesus in his mercy does not give citizenship to all those who fought for him. Instead, he fought for those who were fighting against him and he makes his enemies his friends and he invites sinners to become citizens.

This is the good news of the gospel and all who trust in him, all who have turned from sin and self to follow him, we are now residents of earth, but we are heavenly citizens. And we get to enjoy the privileges of grace for our sin, we have inherited a new name, we get peace in a terrified world, we get comfort for our pain and we get the assurance of his forever unrelenting love. Are you grateful this evening?

But notice, it doesn't say, in order to become a citizen of heaven, live your life worthy. No, Philippians 3:20, which is the only other time this word *politeuomai*. (Poly-two-a-my) is used in Scripture, in **Philippians 3:20, Paul says, but "Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."** Ephesians 2:19 says, **"you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household."**

**Colossians 1:13 says that we have been "rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves."** It is not something that we gain, it is something that we've been given. It's not something that we become, it's something that we have been declared to be.

So friends, heaven is our home. The kingdom of God is our home. We are not physically there, but our citizenship is there and our allegiance is there and our future is there, coming here, right now.

And we are invited as God's people to live lives that are not shaped by the land that we are in, but shaped by the one that we belong to. That we would dare as Christians this evening, living where we are, following King Jesus together as his redeemed people, that we right now are stepping onto heaven's soil in this part of the world. That as we are faithful to him together, that we look a little bit more like the kingdom of God because God has placed a colony of heaven here in Newmarket, Ontario, and he has invited you and I to become a part of it in Jesus.

And the dream is this, is that we would live as a church, into our identity as citizens, as a colony of heaven. And so Paul says, **"live your life worthy of the gospel."** That is, it is a right response to the gift of the gospel that you have received.

Live a life that is consistent with the gospel. Let your citizenship in heaven be the catalyst, the grid through which you show how valuable Christ is, that Christ is supremely worthy, that Christ is

supremely glorious. The bedrock foundation of the perspective of a citizen of heaven is that they understand that when they heard the gospel, they got Christ. And when you get Christ, you get nothing better. There is nothing of greater value to any person's life. Not in all of the universe is there someone more valuable than the person of Christ. And if you're a citizen of heaven this evening, you've got all of him.

Pastor Tim Keller said, "Because the gospel is endlessly rich, it can handle the burden of being the one main thing of a church." And Paul is saying in this text in Philippians 1 that you and I have to start here. This has got to be our starting place. You have to see Jesus for all he is if you are going to live in light of who he is. You've got to know what you have in Jesus. You have to hold that in your soul. The one who has changed you, the one who has saved you, the one who has transformed you, the king that you serve is glorious.

In other words, Paul is saying that in the decisions that you make, make sure that every single decision you make is calculated to the point, to the value, to the worth, and to the glory of Jesus. Because the ethic of heaven, the values of heaven, the priority of heaven, all of that points back to Jesus. His glory, his fame, and his renown.

And so Paul says that if we are going to be citizens of heaven, we've got to be marked by four important characteristics. That if we are to be faithful citizens of the kingdom of heaven, we are to be united, unafraid, hope-filled and fully engaged. We are going to look at 2 of those characteristics tonight and next week, we will look at the other two.

## **1) UNITED AS CITIZENS OF HEAVEN**

Look at what it means in verse 27 to be united.

***"Just one thing: As citizens of heaven, live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, in one accord, contending together for the faith of the gospel," (Philippians 1:27)***

Now we all know this evening how many opportunities we have in our lives to be divided, right? Discord is the way that our world is trending right now. But Paul in our text is saying that our togetherness in Christ shows off the beauty and the power of God to a divided and angry world. Notice the phrase he says, **"standing firm in one spirit, in one accord."**

That phrase there, standing firm, it was a military term. It described the defensive posture soldiers would take. And in an ancient first century army, they would literally link their shields together in one accord and move together as one.

But God's desire and God's design for you this evening is not that you would simply remain in a defensive posture, standing firm, although that's a part of it. Paul goes on to say

**“contending together for the faith of the gospel.”** This contending together is the Greek word *synathleó* (Sin-ath-leo).

“Syn” literally means together or gathered together. And ath-leo is where we get the word athlete. See, Paul pictures the church as a team and he is using this language. He's saying, “Hey, listen, Christianity is a team sport. There is no room for individualism. You cannot go at Christianity alone.”

Please hear me on this, Satan has one strategy, and that is to tear us apart and to tear you apart from God. This is what he's trying to do. This is what he's been trying to do. And for some of you, Satan doesn't have to really try that hard because you're not even connected to the people of God here. There is no unity because there's no connecting. You come in late, you walk in the back, and then you bolt out of here as soon as church is done.

There is no togetherness with the people of God. What did Jesus say in John chapter 13 and verses 34 and 35? Jesus said, **“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. [35] By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34 – 35)**

Did you see that? Jesus connects our integrity and the truth of our witness in the public sphere to the beauty of our togetherness. So Paul is saying this isn't optional. This isn't maybe if we get around to it Christianity. No, this is Christianity. God's design and desire is that you would take both the defensive, that you would stand firm, but that you would also take the offensive position, that you would stand firm on that ground in order to take new ground. And some of you here this evening, you might either be one or the other.

Maybe you're just on the defensive. That is, you're standing firm, but you're just waiting until Jesus comes back. And some of you might be all offense and no defense. You're all gung-ho, but on the other side, you failed to protect the unity of the church. And the greatest argument for the truth of our good news is not a principle, it's not an ultimatum, it's not some great philosophy or some big mic drop one-liner. It's a people united in one faith for the sake of Christ.

This is what it means to be united as the people of God, we're to take both the defensive and the offensive position contending together for the faith of the gospel.

## **2) UNAFRAID AS CITIZENS OF HEAVEN**

Secondly, Paul says that we are to be unafraid as citizens of heaven. Look again at verses 28 and 29:

**“Not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is a sign of destruction for them, but of your salvation—and this is from God. [29] For it has been granted to you on**

***Christ's behalf not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him." (Philippians 1:28 – 29)***

That word frightened there is another one of Paul's word pictures, and it's a word that's used to describe a horse that was not fit for battle. In a first-century cavalry, when soldiers would show up on horseback, there would be some horses that would see the opposition and they would immediately become skittish, and they wouldn't want to run forward, they would run away. And these horses to an army were worthless.

And this is the word that Paul is using for frightened. We live in a day in which people are not kind to the truth of Christianity. In 2022, a journalist by the name of Aaron Renn wrote a fantastic article about how as evangelicals we've moved from a positive world, where things were favourable for Christians because you were a Christian, into a neutral world where, "yeah, leave your religion out of the public sphere, but you do you" kind of thing. And in the last couple of years, he dates it back to 2014, we have moved into a negative world. That is, there is hostility that it can actually cost you something in the public sphere to be a Christian.

See, we live in a society where people are slowly becoming more and more hostile to the truth. Paul knows that that's coming for the Philippians, but Paul knows that that's coming for us. He knows that for those who name the name of Christ, for those whose ethic is the ethic of heaven, that is, everything that God says in His Word informs the way that I interact with people. It's the way that dictates what I do with my family, the way that I see my work, that for those people who are under the authority of God's Word, there are hardships coming because there is an active hostility to Jesus on planet earth.

For a citizen of heaven to place their life under the authority of God's Word as your rule of faith and practice takes courage, Paul is saying. It's going to take courage and a resiliency in today's culture. Paul says that this is what it means to take part of the offensive position, to have courage to a world that is hostile to the truth.

It's going to take a tenacity and a willingness where there's values being pushed on your family and there's hostility being pushed against you in your workplace, that you have to stand there and to say, as Martin Luther said, "My conscience is held captive by the Word of God. I can't move."

And this evening, you cannot stand firm and you cannot point people to the surpassing value and worth of Jesus if you don't know Jesus' book. This is His book. And so, to know the ethic of heaven, to know how Christ has called us to live in a hostile world, we have to know His Word. Paul recognizes that there will be hostility, but it is not an accident. It's not chance. It's not happenstance. Listen, God is with you.

And not only is God with you, but Paul says that this is a clear sign. It is a clear sign from God, for it has been granted to you. That word, granted, in the Greek is the same root word as the word for grace.



The idea here is that it is a grace gift. God has graciously given you a gift, a grace gift that He has granted to you for the sake of Christ and for the advancement of the gospel, that you should not only believe in Him, but you should also suffer for His sake. In other words, this evening, if you are to face persecution, if you are to face suffering, God has given you a gift.

He has given you an opportunity in your workplace, in your sphere of influence, to show off the surpassing value and glory of Jesus Christ to a watching world. And listen, they will see your life and they will not be able to explain it. They will not be able to explain a person who is that joyful in the midst of so much pain. The world does not have an answer for that, but you do. And Paul is saying that that's a gift, that's a gift that God has given you.

We all know that fear is driving a lot of the narrative in our cultural moment. The media, if you turn it on for five seconds, is laced with fear. And the default position of the Christian is so often wanting to bunker down and make it us versus them. And we can actually forget the struggle that is actually going on, the struggle that we're actually engaged in.

In times of fear, the fear that you have is not yours to carry. That fear belongs to the world. When the world is afraid, that fear belongs to the world.

Christians, as a by-product of the gospel, of the sovereignty of God, of the truth that He is near and He will never leave us, we have a promise that creates in us a fearlessness. While the enemies of the gospel throughout the world and throughout church history have rained down everything they could, spewed forth as much venom as they can, thrown the hardest punch they could possibly throw, the church has still remained standing. And coliseums like that in ancient Rome used to fillet Christians are now the things that have crumbled.

So we don't have to fear anything in these times of hostility. We can be unafraid, we can be fearless in the face of hostility to the truth.

Paul says that we are to be united, we're to be unafraid, and next week, we will look at what it means to be Fully Engaged As Citizens of Heaven. Till then, let's continue to live and show the world what it means to be citizens of Heaven and how Jesus can change a life for the better.

Next week, we will look at two more points