

Bryan Station Baptist Church

INDEPENDENT

ORGANIZED 1786

MISSIONARY

THE PIONEER BAPTIST

"Preaching The Same Truth We Preached Before Kentucky Was A State"

VOL. 10

LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

JULY, 1979

NO. 10

Celestial Citizenship

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The subject for this meditation is "CELESTIAL CITIZENSHIP," and the Scripture upon which it is based is Philippians 3:17-21, which I now read:

"Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

The Christian belongs to the society of heaven, even while here on earth as a pilgrim. As beneficiaries of the New Covenant we have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. Our interests are in the heavenly Jerusalem and not in the earthly Jerusalem in the land of Palestine. Everything of earth is temporal and transient. We have no continuing city here, but we seek one to come. Heaven is our fatherland because our heavenly Father is there. Heaven is our commonwealth because our King, Jesus Christ, is there. We are even there now in Him. In Colossians 3:1-4, Paul says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above,

not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

The Christian is in the world physically, but he is not of the world morally. He has been chosen out of the world by Christ, and called out of the world by the Holy Spirit, and separated from the world by faith and manner of life. These are mental and heart experiences and do not isolate us from the world physically, but make us to be lights in the world and the salt of the earth. The Christian has been stripped of his own righteousness, and has been clothed in the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. As a sinner he has committed himself and his eternal interests into the hands of Jesus Christ. He is a person who has lost all hope of ever being accepted by God on his own record, and is accepted in the Beloved. This world is condemned; the Christian is justified. The world lies in the wicked one; the Christian is in Jesus Christ. The lost man is taken captive by Satan; the Christian is one who has been taken captive by Jesus Christ, and will share His fortune in glory. Our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us means to have us with Himself in glory, and for this He prayed, "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with me where I am: that they may behold my glory." The lost world awaits its doom; the Christian awaits his glory.

The Philippian letter treats of salvation as a progressive work of God in the human soul.

And Paul is persuaded that God Who begins the good work will complete it. In the Ephesian letter, Paul says that the Christian is God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works. The work of God in us is manifested in our aspirations after holiness and in our striving for perfection. Both God and the believer works. God's work in us assures our success in striving for perfection which will finally be realized. Paul, although an aged saint, had not reached the prize of perfection but was reaching out after it and pressing forward to seize it. Christ is bringing many sons to glory, not dragging them by the hair of their head, but working in them to work and to will of God's good pleasure. Too many Christians would like to ride to glory in a pullman car with stop-over privileges at Vanity Fair. But nobody will get to heaven on flowery beds of ease. The road to glory is rough and difficult. Paul says that through much tribulation we enter heaven. Perfection is not something that is unattainable, but it is unattained in this life. And this is because God does not complete the Christian in this life. God's last act of salvation is to glorify us and this will not be accomplished until Christ returns. Then will our hands lay hold of the prize of sinless perfection. Then shall we be conformed to the image of God's Son.

After saying that he had not arrived at the goal of perfection, Paul says, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded" (Phil. 3:15). He uses the word "perfect" in two distinct senses: First in the sense of sinlessness and second in the sense of maturity. Let those who are mature or advanced in Christian knowledge remember that they are not yet sinless. Paul did not claim to be sinless, and he wants us to be like-minded. MacLaren says that a sense of imperfection and a continual effort after the higher life are parts of Paul's perfect man, or mature Christian. And again he says, that the measure of our perfection is the consciousness of our imperfection—a paradox but a great truth. In other words, the Christian who thinks right will not pride himself on being sinless. The most advanced Christians are always the most humble Christians.

Now in verses 17-19, the citizens of heaven are warned against the enemies of the cross. He says, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." Who are these enemies of the cross? The commentators differ. Some think they were the pagan adversaries referred to in Chapter 1, verse 28. Others think the reference is to the Judaizers referred to in this third Chapter. In my judgment, he is referring to those abusers of grace who are known as Antinomians—those who are against the law. Paul says their end is destruction or

perdition. Their god is their belly, their inward lusts. Their glory is their shame. They glory in what they ought to be ashamed of. They mind earthly things. They do not love the cross of Christ.

Paul writes about these enemies of the cross in tears. His ministry was a weeping ministry. Great man that he was, he was not ashamed to cry. At Miletus, he reminded the Ephesian elders that for three years he had warned everyone night and day with tears. In Romans 9, as he thinks of his own people in unbelief, he has great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart. Paul's theology was not on ice. He was a man of compassion and wept over the lost. And may God fill our pulpits today with men of compassion!

Paul was a unique person in many ways. The occasion of his tears was different from that of most people. We never find him crying in prison or when he is faced with hunger and persecution. But he wept over sinners. Paul's life was made up of seeming contradictions: "Unknown and yet well-known; dying and behold, alive; chastened and not killed; sorrowful and yet rejoicing; poor and yet making many rich; having nothing and yet possessing all things." What a Christian!

Now in verses 20, 21, we have citizens of heaven looking for the coming of their King. He says, "For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." The Greek text is somewhat difficult to put into English. The Interlinear literal translation renders it, "the commonwealth in heaven exists." As if to say, heaven is a substantial reality. Our commonwealth is not an imaginary place, but a real place of eternal blessedness. Our citizenship or commonwealth is where our King is and He is real, and His coming is going to be real. He is coming in person to complete our salvation in the redemption of our bodies. What a comfort are His words in John 14: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." What greater joy does any bridegroom have than in building a home for the woman he loves better than his own life! And Christ, the Heavenly Bridegroom, will have a home prepared for His bride, His blood-bought and blood-washed Church. And when she has washed her robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, the home in glory will be ready for Her.

But our King has an unfinished task. The legal steps of redemption have been finished. Redemp-

tion by blood was accomplished at the Cross, when He cried, "It is finished." At Calvary Christ obtained eternal redemption for us. Redemption by blood was done once for all, but redemption by power is a process. There is not a person in the world or in heaven whose salvation has been completed. No child of God is fully saved as long as his body lies as ashes in the grave. Salvation is for our body as well as our soul, but we still wait for the redemption of the body by power. Our body is in a state of humiliation until it is fashioned like unto the body of Christ. Life is a gallop to the grave, but the grave is not the end for our body.

A homely little woman once heard W. B. Riley announce that he was going to preach on "The Resurrection of the Body." She said to him, "Are you going to tell us that we are going to have our bodies again?" And when he said, "Yes," she said, "I won't hear you." And when he said, "Why not?" she replied, "Look at me! How homely I am. Everybody talks about it. I don't want this body again; it has never been satisfactory." Then Dr. Riley urged her to come and hear his message. And she came and was not disappointed. At one point in the sermon, Dr. Riley dealt with the "improvement of the body," showing that in the resurrection, the same body we now have will be so greatly improved that it will be like the glorious body of Christ. I am sure every child of God will then be satisfied with his body. The little woman left the meeting with radiant and beaming face as she learned the truth about what her body would be like in the resurrection.

The question is often asked, "Will we have the same body in heaven that we have here?" Yes, so far as identity is concerned: each will have his or her own body and not that of somebody else. But it will not be the same body as to material substance. This natural body of flesh and blood suited to the animal soul will give way to a body suited to the spirit of the just made perfect; it will be a body suited to the heavenly environment. Individuality will be preserved. I will have my own body and you will have yours. But, oh what a difference between the body of our humiliation and the body fashioned like unto His glorious body. And now may I close with some lines from a poet:

"What we in glory soon shall be,
It doth not yet appear,
But when our precious Lord we see,
We shall His image bear.

"With such a blessed hope in view,
We would more holy be,
More like our risen, glorious Lord
Whose face we soon shall see."



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