



MOMENTS TO PONDER
UNVEILING JOY:
EXPLORING THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Episode 93: Heavenly Citizenship (Phil. 3:17-4:1)

Hi Friends! Welcome to Moments to Ponder. This is a podcast designed to help you spend a few moments in God's Word wherever you are and take away something to ponder.

We live in a loud, busy world that can make it hard to find the time to get into God's word and I'm grateful for these moments we have to ponder the book of Philippians in the series that I've titled, Unveiling Joy. I'm Betsy Marvin and this is episode 93.

(music fades)

I have a random question to start us off today?

Do you ever think about your citizenship?

I admit that I don't really think about ...until I'm out of the country and need my passport or it's the fourth of July - then I feel very American. I was born into it, and this plays into taking my citizenship for granted even though I can say, I'm grateful to be an American. I know a few people that have earned their American citizenship, the pride and excitement on their faces after all the work is so telling. Citizenship implies the status of freedom with the accompanying responsibilities which are claimed with their new citizenship.

In our verses today, Paul says our citizenship is in heaven. This has always been an interesting phrase to me and it's this concept that we will focus in on today as we ponder Phil. 3:17-21.

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is

their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body

Phil. 3:12-21 (NIV)

We will come back to the opening verses, but let's dive into verse 20, "*Our citizenship is in heaven*". The idea of citizenship would have been one that the Philippians understood. I mentioned in an earlier podcast that Philippi had a large contingency of Roman military. Here's a little more backstory *taken from N.T. Wright's commentary on Philippians*.

In 42 BC, which is almost 100 years before Paul went to the city, Philippi was the setting for a great civil war that broke out after Julius Caesar died. The two victorious generals, Antony and Octavian (the future Augustus) found themselves with a lot of soldiers with nothing to do. They didn't want them all back in Rome, so they gave them land in Philippi, making it a colony of Rome.

Colonialism doesn't have the best of histories and in this case there is a mixed background as well. Once the colony was established in Philippi, other military veterans made their way there. By the time Paul visits, there are many families that had descended from the original colonists and those that were native to the area. Because of its location on the main road through northern Greece, and its placement on the Adriatic Sea, there would have been close contact with the mother city – Rome.

The Philippian colonists were seen as Roman citizens, living a civic life that matched the way of life in Rome. They benefited from their Roman citizenship, the culture, and the Roman presence of military.

In 48 BC, a few years before the great war, Julius Caesar was declared as the 'universal savior of mankind'. Thus, savior became a common title for the ruling Caesar. This imperial cult – worshipping Caesar, the emperor, as savior and lord – would have been widely practiced.

Naming Jesus as Lord and Savior would be seen as treason and led to many Christians being martyred under Nero's rule. Paul's use of Savior and Lord for Jesus in the passage, especially in regards to their citizenship. Paul said,

“And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control and this comment about Jesus bringing everything under his control would have been seen as a direct contrast to their ruler. For this roman colony, that was a big deal.

It's in this context that we note Paul's words, our citizenship IS in heaven. Present tense. So often when I have read these words, I have assumed he meant someday we'll go to heaven where we belong. But, that's not the case.

If a Philippian said, I am a citizen of Rome, they would not mean... I'm looking forward to going to Rome someday to live...no, in a colony it works the other way around. The point of the colonist, as a roman citizen, was to bring the roman way of life to Philippi expanding Roman influence. We see this over and over again in history...the expansion of influence by a powerful ruling nation.

And, if things got difficult in northern Greece, say a 'barbarian' tribe attacked. The Roman colonists best hope would be that the emperor himself, also called 'savior', or 'rescuer', would come from Rome to them and defend them, defeating their enemies, and continuing the strength of Rome in that area.

In that context, the words of Paul take on a new meaning.

He is saying that the church is at present – a colony of heaven filled with its citizens. The point of this colony is to bring the Christian way of life into their world, expanding the church. On earth as it is in heaven...

“We have our home in heaven, and here on earth we are a colony of heaven's citizens.” Paul is saying: “Just as the Roman colonists never forgot that they belong to Rome, you must never forget that you are citizens of heaven; and your conduct must match your citizenship.” (Barclay)

God sent Jesus to us as Savior and Rescuer. Paul's readers would have fully understood this nod to Rome and it's emperor. Within their context, this would have been a huge challenge whether they were roman citizens or not.

As I said earlier, citizenship implies the status of freedom with accompanying responsibilities. This is why Paul speaks of his life and others who were living as examples in vs. 17. He, also a Roman citizen, chose to cast aside his Roman and Jewish privileges, to press on toward Christ with freedom and responsibility.

Like the Philippians, when you and I became a Christ-follower, we became a new creation, a citizen of heaven. This citizenship comes with freedoms, it brings a new kind of protection for our hearts and lives, it has gifts and Holy Spirit power.

And, as we, live into this citizenship, we need to be careful of leaders that have gone down a path of toward destruction, living lives that no longer represent Christ. Paul has tears and he thinks of those that have chosen selfishness and greed over obedience and integrity. Paul writes of this to the Corinthian church as well in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and to the Romans in Romans 6, showing us that it was as much an issue then as it continues to be today. It's easy to fall into the culture of the world around us, to go back to the citizenship we held before, but like a new citizen in a new country – we need to learn to live into our citizenship with boldness and certainty.

When I travel to say, Mexico, I can feel so different from those who are native to the area. My blond hair marks me as different right away – but my accent, my clothing, my attitude even, shows that I'm not Mexican. When people see me, they can say – there's a tourist 😊. Just as, no matter where I travel, people can tell I'm American...can those I journey with everyday tell I'm a citizen of heaven?

Ponder that for a moment – you are a citizen of heaven. Now. You carry this within the passport of your heart. It's a part of your identity. There is joy, fruit, redemption, and freedom.

Are you living in such a way that those around you know your citizenship?

Christians should be so marked by their heavenly citizenship that they are noticed as different. This is what Paul is calling the Philippian church to do – and he calls us to do the same. To live into the freedoms offered, the new customs and beliefs, even into the attitude of Christ as he mentioned in chapter 2.

I'm going to share our verses for today, again, with all of that context and processing now in your mind:

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Phil. 3:12-21 (NIV)

Paul concludes this section with these words:

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! Phil. 4:1

Dear Ones,

You are a citizen of heaven today, right now, at the moment. You have all the freedoms, fruit, and power that comes with the identity of being his colonist. May the love and joy of Jesus so overflow in you unveil that joy in such a way that others can see your true citizenship.

You are loved.

Amen.