



Our Citizenship

When you were in school, did you ever get the citizenship of the month award? Honoring kids in this way has become a regular practice in our culture. You have seen the bumper stickers that say, "My child was citizen of the month at Anywhereville Elementary School". It seems statements like that are abundant on the shiny bumpers of America these days.

Citizenship brings certain privileges and certain responsibilities. As for privileges, as citizen of the month, a school child may get to walk first in line, or have his or her picture posted in the front of the school entryway. But that same child has now also been called to a level of responsibility too. He is expected to obey the rules, act mannerly and be a servant to his fellow classmates and his teachers, having the interests of others and the interest of the school itself as a top priority.

Well personally, I don't recall being named "citizen of the month" at my elementary school, but I can recall the moment when I made the choice to become a citizen of heaven. God didn't give me a bumper sticker but as I have walked in relationship with Him, my citizenship has become a top priority in my life. Let's look at verse 20 of Philippians 3. It says,

"But our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."

As Christians, through faith we have become citizens of heaven. As with all citizenship, responsibilities and privileges are given and expected so we would be wise to consider this verse carefully. Let's look at responsibilities first. As we do, in looking at the wording of this verse, I believe the most powerful word in it is the word "But". Whenever a verse begins with that word we have to consider what has been said before, that is now being challenged or stretched out further.

So... look back for a minute. In verses 18-19 we memorized a description of the person who has their mind set on earthly things. This person is described as:

- Their destiny is destruction
- Their god is their stomach
- Their glory is in their shame
- Their mind is on earthly things

We discussed those things last week. For sure and certain the person who lives in this way is not going to get the "citizenship of heaven award" because she is so set on this world, she is not honoring heaven and the things of God at all. But as we move to verse 20, we see the first word, "But". For the person of faith, verse 20 is saying, 'But as citizens of heaven we shouldn't be like that.' This word "But" tells me that as a citizen of heaven:

- My destiny is life
- My God is the Lord God Almighty and I have given Him free reign over my fleshly desires
- My reputation is of one who lives to give honor to God and to His wonders and attributes
- My mind is on heavenly things

Quite a difference wouldn't you say? That word "But" makes it very clear that citizens of heaven are not to live as described in verses 18-19. But... as a citizen of heaven, it is my responsibility to live with my mind set on heaven and the things of God! That is a big responsibility that I need to seriously consider each day.

Now as a citizen of heaven, what about the privileges? Recently in America, we have had a very heated election season as we sought to elect a new president. During the time leading up to the election, I had lunch with a woman who is originally from another country; however she has lived here in the states for quite some time now and has become a citizen of the USA. When I realized she was also going to get to vote in our election I asked her, "So is your citizenship in your other country now void?"

"Oh no," she said, "We have a dual citizenship." As we continued to discuss this, she went on to say with a bit of jest, "We keep telling people, if the election here doesn't go the way we would like for it to go, we have an out, we will just go back to our other country, but you all have to stay here!"

I thought about that a lot... especially in light of our verse this week. In a sense, we too have a dual citizenship. By that I mean, as Christians we do live here, on the earth, in a country, under its rules and standards. As we do, the Bible calls us to be men and women of honor and integrity, serving those around us, loving people and being a blessing. As a citizen of a country on earth, we also receive some of the privileges of our homelands.

But...(there is that word again ☺) our true citizenship is in heaven and as this verse tells us,

"we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ"

Let's consider why we would eagerly be awaiting a Savior from heaven? As Christians we try to comprehend the benefits of heaven. The Bible tells us we can't even imagine the benefits for us there. But, just as my friend, we have at least figured out that this isn't all there is, we have an out, our out is heaven. We are not stuck with the way things are here. What hope that brings! What a privilege that is. Let's continue to look a little deeper into the "why" of this second phrase in verse 20.

First of all, through faith, we eagerly await the day Jesus will return in our future and take us to heaven with Him. We won't have to live in this land where sin has been allowed free reign any longer. We eagerly anticipate His return because we know that the benefits of heaven will be great to us when we arrive there.

But I also believe, through faith, we right now eagerly await a Savior from there in the ways He comes into our lives in the day to day, transforming us, bringing us life and right thinking and redemption and healing and wholeness and hope. As a citizen of heaven who is living on the earth, each morning I awake eagerly needing His daily presence. It is part of the privilege of being a citizen of heaven, even while I live on the earth. I am so thankful for that...

Citizenship equals responsibilities and privileges. In the kingdom of heaven, God doesn't just pick one citizen a month; He has called us all to citizenship, with its responsibilities and with its privileges. Are you a citizen of heaven? I hope so. I hope you will take the responsibilities and the privileges very seriously and with joy and thankfulness too.

We may not have been "citizens of the month" at our schools, but I take gladness in the fact that if God had a chariot, He would have a bumper sticker with my name on it and yours too! A fellow citizen in the kingdom of heaven...

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