

2016\_02\_21 Passion 2 | Sermon  
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL  
Pastor David Pfeiffer

## **Our Citizenship Is In Heaven**

Philippians 3:17-4:1

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I bring you grace and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Jesus name, dear fellow citizens with the saints and fellow members of the household of God,

It is nice to fit in. There is an innate need in each of us to belong. If we can't see where we fit in, if we don't belong somewhere, then who are we? So, in some way, with some group, with some way of defining ourselves, we try to fit in.

A young boy stares down a long hallway and listens as locker doors slam and little groups gab and he wonders where he will fit in. He just turned thirteen when his parents made the decision to move. They had been living near a small town out in the country. The school he went to was nothing more than one room. It was a private Christian school, grades 1-8, and there were only nine of them in the whole school. But his dad got a new job in the city where there was no Christian school. And now he stairs down a hallway of uncertainty.

The huge hallways seemed endless; locks opening and shutting. Groups of kids here and there, talking, laughing. And there he was, feeling out of place. They looked at him like he was from outer space. He dressed differently. He talked differently. He acted differently. So where was his group? Where was he supposed to fit in? Where does he go next?

If you are like me, you feel a bit anxious for the boy. He's at an awkward age already, and now he has to try to make friends in a big, new school. In his old school there were no distinctions between ages – everyone played together. There was no sense of who was cool and who was not – everyone was friends. And now he is thrown into a setting where each little group is defined by how they talk, how they dress, how they act. Are you a jock or a nerd? Are you the boy who wears hand-me-down clothes from K-Mart or the boy who picks out his own clothes at the mall? He stares down an endless hallway of uncertainty and wonders where he is supposed to go from here.

I'd like you to use this picture to figure out where you fit in too. As Christians, we look at the world we live in and sometimes it's difficult to see where we fit in. We look out on a world that is fractured, different groups getting together to talk and laugh and we wonder which group we belong to. We watch the news and see our country divided, and it is soon discovered we are not living in the same united nation we once thought existed. There are republicans and democrats, homosexuals and homophobics, the citizen and the immigrant, the successful and the underprivileged, the up and coming generation and the generation which is growing old and fading away. We listen to all the different voices coming out of the talking box and they each define themselves by how they talk, how they dress, how they act. So where do you fit in?

So the Apostle Paul takes up the question in Philippians chapter 3 where he shows us where we belong.

#### **Philippians 3:17–4:1**

<sup>17</sup> Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. <sup>18</sup> 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: <sup>19</sup> whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* belly, and *whose* glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

This Word of the Lord is spoken for you. We pray, Lord, teach us to know You, and the fellowship of Your sufferings, and the power of Your resurrection. Amen.

Notice the stark difference – you have those who are being conformed to this world: the enemies of the cross, the ones who worship their belly and their own glory, who set their mind on earthly things. This group defines itself by its success; they are always wanting never waiting and never fully having; they are conforming their looks and behavior to whatever will bring them glory. And their end is destruction. On the other hand you have those who are being conformed to another world, a heavenly kingdom, something to come. This group defines itself not by success, but by suffering; this group is always waiting rather than wanting; this group is conforming their looks and behavior, not to the image of this world's glory, but to the image of their Lord. And their end is transformation and eternal glory with Christ. My beloved brethren, stand

fast with this second group. This is where you belong. For **Our Citizenship Is In Heaven.**

He's sees a group of kids standing by their locker and talking so he decides to join in. They are talking about the exam next period and how there was no need to study last night. The teacher never really pays attention. They've devised a plan to cheat on the test where they'll leave their books open on the floor so that they can get the answers. He doesn't know if he should join in or stand out.

The world wants you to join in. Its not wrong if you don't get caught. The question is not, "is it right?" But, "who does it hurt?" That's the question. So questions of morality are not a matter of how does this make God feel, but how does this make me feel. If everyone else is doing it, it can't be wrong can it?

We should be careful who we are following and where we are seeking to fit in. As Paul writes,

*18 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: 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.*

Their appetite is their own idol. A god within. Whatever will satisfy their stomach at that particular moment. Just look at our cultures constantly shifting boundaries. Issues of gender, sexual revolution, life in the womb, eugenics, no distinction between differing religions: these are all ways of satisfying what the stomach wants. There is no order to life. It is just a matter of impulse. The god which the world serves is its own belly. And the end of this is destruction.

So Paul writes, "follow us, as a pattern for you, a model for Christian citizenship." Follow Jeremiah who stands out and stands up against his own people in an effort to save them from destruction. For he knew, and we know that our citizenship is in heaven. And that means you are satisfied by something the world cannot see. To the world you are strange, a foreigner to this world. When Paul uses the word "citizenship" he uses a word which means "a colony." What he is saying is, you are like a colony planted in the middle of a foreign community. You have your own cultural interests and ethnical traits and civic loyalties that separates you from the rest of the natives. You come from a place where there is one group, one classroom, one way of talking about truth. Like Jeremiah, it means you will stand out and can expect to be persecuted for it. But as Paul writes, this is your example, those who have walked before you. And their end is eternal. So you know what you are waiting for.

The boy was waiting around, during lunch, when a group of friends started asking him questions. With a condescending tone, one girl asks, "What kind of jeans are those?" He wonders what they are talking about? What brand of jeans does he wear? He's never even looked or thought about it. He says, he doesn't know, since he got them from his older brother. Every one at the lunch table burst out laughing. But he doesn't get what's so funny.

How much do we find ourselves influenced by the way the world tells us to look and act? The talking box tells it to us all the time. You see it in just about every commercial. There stands the tennis player, Andre Agassi, and he's being photographed from this angle and that. He stands there, posing, with his signature headband and nineties hair-due flared out above his head, and he says, "Image is everything."

What defines you as a Christian? What defines you as a human? Maybe you've been told it's the car you drive, the shiny shoes you wear, the salary you make, the great health care you receive, the people you are friends with. Maybe it's the shirt with a swoosh on it that you see them wearing. Maybe it's the drugs, drinks, and parties that you know they are going to. Maybe it's the bad language, vulgar jokes, stories about sin that you hear them talking about. After all, "Image is everything."

Of course, Jesus was concerned with a different sort of image he wanted to uphold. He wasn't interested in fitting in. Rather he was looking for something deeper and more lasting than the superficial glories of the world. The image that the world would paste onto your screens is a fading glory. It is a promise of something which gives you nothing. So Paul writes that their glory is their shame. Their glory is to get more for themselves, to be something better for themselves, to accomplish something greater for themselves. And it is to their shame. It is for these lusts, this greed, that we too have been ashamed.

But Jesus' glory was something hidden in sacrifice, yet to be revealed in resurrection, given up for you. And that is why he died. His glory proved that this world's glories would never last. He threatens to take away all glory from us, by proving the glory is his alone. This is why they are enemies of the cross. Anyone whose goal is to find glory in this world becomes an enemy of the cross. Anyone who preaches a better life, dreams come true, the power of being you, what great things God wants to give you in this life – their glory is their shame and they are enemies of the cross.

The cross marks the end of this world and the loss of all the shiny things it promises. On the cross, Jesus leaves this world; abandons it and all the pleasures it might offer. His image is conformed to something greater and more lasting. And that is why he is our Lord. Because he was able to subdue all things to himself. No one would be his master. Not greed, not lust, not popularity, not his own belly. Rather, his loyalty was to God and God alone. And that is why he died. To be faithful in everything, and to make the sacrifice none of us could make.

In this he became master even of death. He would not be ruled by death. For his image, his glory in his innocent death could not be diminished. This is where he gives us our citizenship. This is where we belong. This is where he waits for us. And so we wait for him. And so we don't set our mind on earthly things, but on heavenly goals.

Take homeschooling for example. Many parents are skeptical about homeschooling. They are worried the kids won't learn social skills. They won't learn how to fit in and make friends. They won't learn how to compete at sports and keep up with the world. I've thought these things too. And I'm a homeschooler. But what are we saying? Aren't we basically saying that we want our kids to conform? And is it so great an accomplishment to see our kids fit in? What is Paul saying? Isn't he saying that as Christians, we can expect to stand out, to seem a little weird or awkward at times? Doesn't he mean that we don't really fit in, and that's all right? For our citizenship is in heaven.

So a kid who grows up in a Christian day school where there are only nine students in the whole school, learns something more valuable than social sense. He learns spiritual sense. He becomes sensitive to sins that otherwise he would not have had any sense of. He learns that his image is not defined by this world, but he is conformed to Christ. He learns what it means to be a citizenship of a heavenly kingdom.

On the other hand, we don't want to keep our kids so sheltered that they have no interaction with the world. God wants Christians in the world, engaged, interactive, standing firm and standing out, leading by example. He wants us to learn to make friends and to learn to be the right kind of friend. He wants us to fit in as Christ fit in. He interacted with every sort. He was in the world, but not of the world. So we know we are citizens of two worlds at the same time. But what guides us, what defines us, is not what the world thinks of us – but what God has said about us: our baptism. We are not defined by what jeans we wear or what group we are friends with. For this lowly body will be transformed into the likeness of his glorious body. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom and we are waiting for our Lord.

Looking down a long hallway of slamming lockers and groups gabbing, we see people coming, going, in such a rush. They look at you a little weird, like you don't fit in. They sometimes tempt you to join in, and laugh at you when you don't. But just then you see a person standing all alone in that hallway. Its the Apostle Paul. And he comes up to you and says, "Stand firm in the Lord." Amen.