

“Our Citizenship is in heaven”

Intro: I want to share with you a quote. As I read think about who is being described:

‘The most divine _____ . . . we should consider equal to the Beginning of all things . . . for when everything was falling (into disorder) and tending toward dissolution, he restored it once more and gave the whole world a new aura; _____ . . . the common good Fortune of all . . . The beginning of life and vitality . . . All the cities unanimously adopt the birthday of the divine _____ as the new beginning of the year . . . Whereas the Providence which has regulated our whole existence . . . has brought our life to the climax of perfection in giving to us _____ . . .who being sent to us and our descendents as Savior, has put an end to war and has set all things in order; and (whereas,) having become (god) manifest, _____ has fulfilled all the hopes of earlier times . . . the birthday of _____ has been for the whole world the beginning of good news concerning him.’

As you read this, who did you put in the blanks? Most of us in reading it might imagine that it is a commentary by some later writer about Jesus and the impact He had on the world. We hear familiar Biblical terms and phrases like God, Savior, gospel, beginning of all things; we read about the beginning of a new era, the end of war, the climax of perfection. But would you be surprised if I told you that this quote was not about Jesus. Let’s fill in the blanks.

‘The most divine Caesar . . . we should consider equal to the Beginning of all things . . . for when everything was falling (into disorder) and tending toward dissolution, he restored it once more and gave the whole world a new aura; Caesar . . . the common good Fortune of all . . . The beginning of life and vitality . . . All the cities unanimously adopt the birthday of the divine Caesar as the new beginning of the year . . . Whereas the Providence which has regulated our whole existence . . . has brought our life to the climax of perfection in giving to us (the emperor) Augustus . . .who being sent to us and our descendents as Savior, has put an end to war and has set all things in order; and (whereas,) having become (god) manifest, Caesar has fulfilled all the hopes of earlier times . . . the birthday of the god (Augustus) has been for the whole world the beginning of good news concerning him.’

The quotation comes from an ancient inscription in Asia Minor about Caesar Augustus.

One of things that we may not see is the challenge that the message of the gospel presented to the NT culture. Jesus was born into a world where the Roman Empire was considered the manifestation of the reign of the gods. Caesar was Lord, Savior, and Son of God. Throughout the empire His laws were to be obeyed and in his honor temples were erected that offered sacrifices to him.

Rome was the greatest city on earth and the peace of Rome was the emperor's gift to the world.

Knowing this can make us appreciate even more the words of the apostles of Christ. Consider these words of Paul to the Philippians:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Phil. 3:20–21)

These words of the apostle Paul are especially important in view of the people to whom he wrote them.

The Philippians were citizens of Rome

One of the important things to remember in reading Paul's letter to the Philippians is that, though Philippi was located in Greece, it was a Roman colony. What that suggests is that Philippi was an example of how the Romans transported the city of Rome to other parts of the empire. The goal was to make it as much like Rome as possible.

In Rome, Roman gods were worshipped.

In Rome, the Caesar was honored as Lord and Savior of the empire.

In Rome, the values were worldly and the glory of the city was in its great temples and palaces, its impressive forum, etc.

So then in Philippi, Roman gods were to be worshipped.

In Philippi, the Caesar was to be honored as Lord and Savior of the people.

In Philippi, the worldly values and glory of Rome were to be duplicated in Philippi's culture.

So then when we hear Paul say "our citizenship is in heaven..." it would go to the heart of what Philippi claimed to be; it would be seen as a challenge to Philippi's identity as a Roman colony. But more importantly, it would challenge the Christians in Philippi to live not as citizens of Rome, but as citizens of the New Jerusalem, where their Lord lived.

But what does it mean to say, "Our citizenship is in heaven?"

Our Names Are Written in Heaven's Book

In the ancient world, the citizens of a city were enrolled in a register just as today we might receive a birth certificate that indicates that we are citizens of the United States.

As Christians our names have been written in heaven.

Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. (Philippians 4:3)

Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven. (Luke 10:20)

We Obey Heaven's Laws

We worship heaven's God, the Father, rather than the idols of false religion.

"For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him." (1 Corinthians 8:5–6, NASB)

We submit to heaven's lord, Jesus Christ, rather than to men who are exalted to rule. We understand that Jesus was raised from the dead to rule over the kingdom of God, that all authority has been given Him in heaven and on earth.

"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. "' (Matthew 28:18–20, NASB)

Consequently, we submit ourselves to the teaching of Jesus. We value the things that God values and glory in the things in which the Lord glories.

We Speak Heaven's Language

Just as a citizen speaks the language of his country, so Christians speak the language of heaven. It affects what we talk about.

It doesn't mean that we go around quoting Scripture to everyone all the time; but it does mean that our interests are more spiritual and deeper than the worldly things around us.

"If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." (Colossians 3:1–2, NASB)

It affects how we talk about it..

It is interesting that those gathered around the fires in Caiphas' place could tell from Peter's speech that he was not from around there. So likewise today we can often detect the accent of a foreign national who has come into our country.

So there should be a clear and distinct quality to our speech that would say to others that we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person." (Colossians 4:6, NASB)

"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear." (Ephesians 4:29, NASB)

We are Loyal to Heaven's Cause

Again it is interesting to note that decrees from the emperor were often sent out as “glad tidings,” the *euangelion* or good news of the emperor’s successes. Roman citizens were to find great pride in the victories of the Roman armies and the *pax Romana* (the peace of Rome that they brought about.)

But since our citizenship is in heaven, we are interested in the “glad tidings” of God’s prophets who announced that a great king was coming into the world and whose kingdom would prevail over all earthly kingdoms.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” (Isaiah 9:6–7, ESV)

The peace he brings would not come through the conquest of swords but rather through the proclamation of the cross.

We Are Looking for Heaven's Redemption

“Our citizenship is in heaven from which also we wait for a Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

It is interesting that the visit of the emperor to a city was called in Greek his *parousia*; and all the citizens of the kingdom would go out to greet him and welcome him into the city. The coming of the emperor would mean great blessing to that city and great joy to its citizens. The Philippians would not have missed the power of Paul’s words. And consider Paul’s words to the Thessalonians not far away. Paul tells them, “Our king also is coming; and God’s people will go out to meet him.”

“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

But to live where our king is to go into a world where there is no death. How can we then participate?

Christians have the promise that they will be raised to a new glorious body.

In life are spirits are being redeemed to become like God so that we may be suitable citizens of the heavenly city.

But at last we must submit to death; but even so, we have the hope that our bodies will also be redeemed.

By this redemption we can be prepared to live forever in the eternal kingdom of the Father.

Conclusion: Dwight Moody once complained about some Christians, “Some people are so heavenly minded that they are not able to accomplish any earthly good.” I understand why that might be said.

But we should never forget the importance of being heavenly minded, of remembering that the focus of our life It defines everything about us.