

[immigration transform]

:: philippians 3.20-4.1 ::

We have a really exciting passage this morning. There's a lot packed into just a few lines of text and I'm hoping it will stir us up in the way that Paul hoped it would.

Our text is Philippians 3 verse 20 through chapter 4 verse 1.

Here it is:

Philippians 3:20-4:1 - For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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. Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

Obviously, the subject of immigration is a huge issue in our culture today. It is hotly debated and folks are very vocal about their opinions. It should be easy to get into the frame of mind that Paul wants us to be in, because he's talking about our spiritual immigration as people who are born again into God's Kingdom and therefore have become citizens of heaven.

As citizens, we receive some interesting and powerful rights and privileges. However, God's plan for us includes a certain route that He has set before His people. And that route examined in this text.

Last time we were together we saw that we cannot hope to enjoy the blessings of God if we're not going to take on the way of the cross. What we see this morning is that there is a glorious plan that the Lord has for His people, but within that plan we are given a specific route. Some have called it the *Royal Route To Heaven*.

It is by the salvation of Jesus Christ that we are made into citizens of heaven. But salvation is more than simply forgiveness of sins. In fact, it includes much more, as illustrated in this text.

First, there is **redemption** from sin. Paul says:

Philippians 3.20 - For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the SAVIOR, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus stood in our place and took the penalty of sin as Savior, and because we have believed on Him for salvation, He has **redeemed** us from sin and death forever and made us His own.

But there's more.

Philippians 3.21a - ...who will transform our lowly body...

The *spiritual* effect of sin is dealt with by redemption, but in the salvation of Christ we also receive a future **transformation**. And that's something to be worked up about. Because one day we are going to be free from the *physical* effects of sin as well. Sickness gone. Pain gone. Fatigue and heaviness gone. This is exciting because, as Paul aptly points out, our bodies are lowly. They don't work quite right. They were marvelously designed by God, but terribly corrupted by sin. Citizenship in heaven provides us the privilege of having our bodies overhauled one day, transformed into something heavenly.

Paul continues in verse 21 and says,

Philippians 3.21b - ...that it may be conformed to His glorious body.

Transformation ends in **glorification**, where we finally not only put on immortality, but are living embodiments of the glory of God. The Lord, having redeemed and transformed us, will bring us to an existence that isn't just what He constructed in the Garden of Eden. There He created sinless humans and called them good. But, in heaven, we aren't good. We're glorious. Because God looks upon His people and says, "I will do more in you than before. I will draw us nearer together and bless you even more than before." It's not just a *return* to the way things were before we brought sin into the world, it's something *greater* and more *glorious*. That is the final stage of our citizenship, when we are forever with the Lord.

Redemption, transformation, glorification. They're inspiring privileges we receive from our God as spiritual immigrants, given grace by the King.

But there are 2 other benefits to our citizenship. They are **conformation** and **sanctification**.

The word **sanctification** doesn't appear specifically in our text, but it is illustrated by idea that our Lord and Savior is currently dwelling in heaven and He has changed our citizenship. God has called us out of the world and is going to usher us into His Kingdom one day. We are sanctified by His power and His grace to be brought out of the world and into eternity.

Part and parcel with sanctification is **conformation**. Paul used the word **conformation** there in verse 21. He was speaking of how God transforms our bodies to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ, but that word reminds us of the *spiritual* conformation that we are commanded to undergo in the Bible.

Romans 12.2 - And do not be CONFORMED to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Romans 8.29-30 - For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be CONFORMED to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

1 Peter 1.13-16 - Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not CONFORMING yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

It's an amazing plan. What we receive as Christians, as citizens of heaven, is more than *just* redemption, though that would be by itself more than we deserve. We also receive sanctification and transformation and conformation and glorification from God, whose desire is to fill and fill and fill until we're fully and finally in heaven, finished with our journey from earth to eternity, and are before Him in a glorious, immortal body.

That's the plan. That is what God is going to accomplish within you.

So what is the point then? What's the application? Why can't we just sit back and see this happen since God is almighty and sovereign? Take a look again at verse 1 of chapter 4.

Philippians 4.1 - Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

This passage beautifully demonstrates the eternal truth that though God is sovereign and all-powerful, He simultaneously supplies us a free will with which we can either press into Him or drift away from Him. Like Abraham and Lot, we are a people called out by God toward a promised land, yet we are free to choose whether we will settle in Sodom or in Canaan.

A citizen of heaven must have allegiance to the Lord. We must bow before the rule of Jesus Christ, who is the One who accomplishes all of this by His power. God is able to subdue all things to Himself, yet He allows us to freely choose how we are going to live this life, even though we have been blood-bought by Him on the cross.

This is a remarkable thing.

Since we are able to choose how we will live, Paul urges us to stand fast in the Lord. The word there means to persevere. Don't stop. We saw Sunday how pressing on is one part, persevering amidst difficulty is another. The same idea is presented in Philippians. We are to *press on* as fervent runners. But we must then *persevere* as we run the race. There are obstacles. There are traps. There are adversaries and difficulties. But if we want the completion that God desires for us, the completion that God offers to His people, we must stand fast in the Lord.

Along the way in life, sometimes a couple of things tend to happen. Using the immigrant and citizenship analogy that Paul is making we can look at it like this:

Sometimes we start trying to have dual citizenship. We like the promises of heaven but we'd also like to indulge in the pleasures of earth. But the Bible is very clear and very frank on this type of thinking:

Matthew 6.24 - No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

James 4.4 - Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

God's word is not speaking to unbelievers in these texts. It is speaking to us. We cannot have dual citizenship. Salvation is brought through the cross of Jesus Christ and we are *commanded* to take that cross upon ourselves and live in submission to the Lord.

The other problem we sometimes run into is a sort of spiritual illegal immigration. Here's what I mean by that: In our thinking, illegal immigration is when a person chooses not to follow the legal route by which they can become a legitimate citizen. They cut corners. They want to be a part of the kingdom, but they do not submit to the methods that are commanded by the king.

We can do this in the Christian life. We *LIKE* redemption. We like to be set free from the weight of our sin. We *LIKE* glorification. I'm pretty excited that there is an eternal place waiting for me and once there I will receive an eternal, glorified body.

But we don't always like conformation and sanctification as much. It's hard to be shaped into a mold and purified by the Spirit of God and the word of God. It is a difficult process that requires patience and endurance and humility. It hurts when God strips away those things which are in contradiction to His nature and His love for us. And we have the tendency to kick against that process and we sometimes find ourselves cutting corners in the Christian life.

But the route to heaven includes the work of sanctification and conformation. What did Jesus say to Peter? He said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in Me." We cannot have one part in Christ and not the others. We cannot have glorification without sanctification.

And while we know that God will complete the good work He began in us, His people, we also know that we are responsible to stand fast in Him. We must submit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ. We must abide as citizens on our way home, holding to the heavenly code of conduct that we have received. Not cutting corners, not courting the world, not picking and choosing which part of the Christian life are more comfortable or enjoyable than others and making God in our own image.

Instead, we should fix our gaze on what lies ahead. The Person, the place, the transformation, the presence of the Savior, eternally ours, who are loved by God and are called according to His purpose.