

## SERMON – PASTOR GREG

13/03/2022

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent. Philippians 3:17-4:1. *Join with others in following my example, brothers (and sisters), and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say 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 on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under him, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Therefore, my brothers (and sisters), you whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember a few years ago when many Australians had to return to the polls because their elected politicians were accused of having dual citizenship? All of us here today are dual citizens- of Australia and of Heaven.

But first- three questions:

**Could you say with Paul: “Join with others in following my example...imitate me as I imitate Jesus Christ”?**

**Is everyone welcome here- is everyone welcome to commune at the Lord’s Table?**

**What is your attitude to those who do evil?**

I never had any great dream or ambition to go overseas. But Alicia did. In fact, before she met me at the age of 23 she went overseas for 7 months- to Canada and then to Europe- often travelling by herself! Before that there was a trip to PNG with a cousin when they were both 17. A year after we got married I had to get a passport. We went to Vanuatu for two weeks. We had a good time but when we returned I said that she can burn my passport! While I was studying at the Seminary, Alicia’s parents bought us a trip to Israel and Turkey: In the footsteps of St Paul. And I had to get another passport! Then in 2007 I had to get another one- to go to Cambodia. And a few more trips after that. Most times, when I returned, I said that ‘that is the last time’. While there are many good memories I am never really comfortable going overseas and especially when some official wants to take my passport! And I hate going through customs- even when returning home. But when I am finally out of the airport and in my car- then I AM HAPPY! I am safe. I know where I am going. I know what foods I am going to eat. I am not afraid of the police or the army or some tuk-tuk driver wanting more than he should. To be an Australian citizen is a wonderful thing. To belong to this country is a wonderful gift. And with that gift come RIGHTS and RESPONSIBILITIES.

Paul was a Jew and a Roman citizen and as such he too had rights and responsibilities. To the Temple and the Synagogue and to the Roman Empire. Two of the rights he had as a Roman citizen were that he could appeal to Caesar and that he could not be flogged with rods/scourged or crucified! (See Acts 16:37; 22:25; 25:11). In those times, it was a precious thing to be a Roman citizen. You became one of you were born of a Roman family or paid a lot of money or you were rewarded because of outstanding service to Rome.

But Paul was also a citizen of a far greater empire than Rome- he was a citizen of Heaven. He was not born into it. He had paid no money for it. He had done nothing to earn it. In fact, as we know so well, he was violently opposed to anyone claiming that Jesus was Lord. But because of His wonderful grace, God- through His Son Jesus Christ brought Paul into His kingdom and conferred on him- citizenship in Heaven.

**Philippians 3:20: *Our citizenship is in heaven.***

**Ephesians 2:19: *(We are) fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.***

**1 Peter 2:9: *You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.***

Like Paul, we were not born as citizens of Heaven. Rather, we were born into bondage to sin and to Satan. Like Paul we could never buy our way in- with money or good works. And like Paul, we have done nothing to deserve this citizenship. But like Paul- we have become citizens of heaven by God's amazing grace- when He spoke His life giving word to us either when we were baptised as infants or when we heard His word as an adult. It is the same grace-filled and life-giving word that saves us and declares us to be citizens of heaven.

And we have rights and responsibilities. Rights? To deny the devil and his accusations. The right to approach God's throne of grace with confidence (Hebrews 4:16). The right to come to the Table of the Lord Jesus Christ and receive his body and blood with the bread and wine.

**Our responsibilities? Colossians 3:5,12: *Put to death sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language...Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another and forgive and love.***

This is the way Citizens of Heaven are to live.

Returning to my first three questions:

**Could you say with Paul: "Join with others in following my example...imitate me as I imitate Jesus Christ"?** Sometimes- yes and sometimes- no. But like Paul, let us strove to imitate Christ but always returning to him- because we fail and knowing that he is always ready to forgive us.

**Is everyone welcome here- is everyone welcome to commune at the Lord's Table?** All are welcome to come here and hear the Word of God but only REPENTANT SINNERS are welcome to attend to Table of the Lord- here on earth and later in heaven.

**What is your attitude to those who do evil?**

Genesis 6:5,6: *The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved.*

Philippians 3: 18: *For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.*

Luke 13:34: *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings but you were not willing.*

Ezekiel 18:32: *For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!*

God wants all people to be saved- God wants to grant Heavenly Citizenship to all people- that is why He sent His One and Only Son to live, to die and to rise for you and for me and for the whole world. To God be the glory great things He has done. Amen.