

## Philippians 3:20 – 4:1

*Philippians 3:20 (NLT) But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for Him to return as our Savior. <sup>21</sup> He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like His own, using the same power with which He will bring everything under His control. <sup>4:1</sup> Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord.*

Philippi was a Roman colony. This meant that many of its inhabitants were Roman citizens, which was a big deal since few people in the Empire had citizenship status. Roman citizens had significant legal rights and economic opportunities that non-citizens lacked. Most likely, several of the Philippian Christians were Roman citizens, and many others wished they could be.

Paul did not denigrate Roman citizenship. After all, Paul was himself a Roman citizen, and he sometimes used his citizenship rights to secure legal protection and due process (see Acts 16:35-39; 25:10-12). Furthermore, Paul called Christians to demonstrate respectful submission to human governing authorities whether they were citizens or not (see Romans 13:1-7).

Yet Paul makes it clear in this passage that Roman citizenship is not of ultimate concern to Christians. He cites two reasons for this position:

- Christians belong to God's kingdom, and so our ultimate loyalty is to a different King – the Lord Jesus Christ. We will unpack this truth and one of its practical implications below.



- An inordinate love of our earthly citizenship is a spiritual trap that Christians should avoid. Notice that 3:20 begins with the word “But.” This means that what Paul says in this verse is in contrast to what he said in 3:18,19:

*3:18 For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth. 20 **But** we are citizens of heaven . . .*

Paul’s warning concerns people (including the Christians he is addressing) who become “enemies of the cross of Christ” because they “think only about life here on earth.” Whether we realize it or not, when we over-value our earthly citizenship, we under-value our heavenly citizenship and set ourselves against God’s priorities. Our Savior is not any human ruler or nation-state; our Savior is Jesus, who rescued us from our sins by giving His perfect life to be executed on a Roman cross.

What a Savior we have! Notice how Paul extols Jesus and the kingdom of which He has made us citizens:

- *“We are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives.”* Jesus not only died on the cross for our sins; He also conquered death through His bodily resurrection. He has ascended to heaven and exercises His power as Lord to advance His kingdom. He is no mere human ruler who lives remotely from His subjects. He is personally accessible to help us as we serve Him (Matthew 28:20 – “I am with you always, even to the end of the age”).
- *“We are eagerly waiting for Him to return as our Savior.”* The day is coming when Jesus will return bodily to establish His kingdom over all the earth. This is why, just after Jesus



ascended to heaven, His angels told His disciples: *“This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”* (Acts 1:11). We do not know exactly *when* He will return, but we know *that* He will return. The proper response to this fact is to “eagerly wait for Him,” rather than to get inordinately consumed by earthly hopes of financial prosperity, political ideology, etc.

- *“He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like His own.”* When Jesus returns, He will give us glorified bodies that are just like His own resurrected body. They will suit us to live forever with Him in His Kingdom. No more sickness, no more death, no more physical pain, no more unresolved sorrow (Revelation 21:4). No more doctor visits (though we are thankful for doctors!), no more health insurance premiums, no more funerals. Perfect physical health and vitality and expanded capacities that will make our youthful health and vigor pale in comparison!
- *“(He will use) the same power with which He will bring everything under His control.”* When Jesus returns, He will establish His perfect kingdom over all the earth. He will exert His unlimited power to permanently defeat evil and to transform the earth so that it radiates the beauty and fruitfulness for which He created it. Think back to your most awesome experience with nature – and then multiply it by an infinite degree. The earth will be *filled* with the glory (excellence, majesty, beauty) of the Lord (Psalm 72:19)!

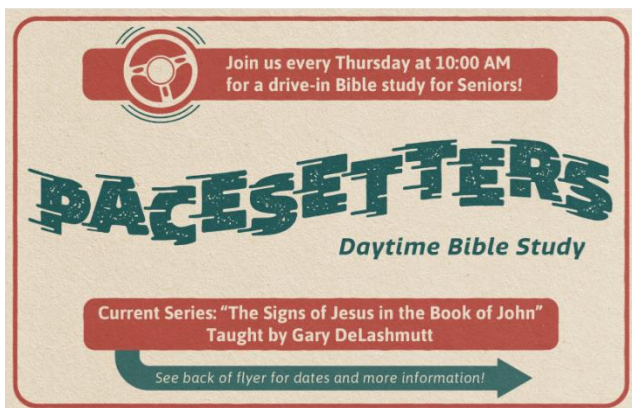
How should we respond to these amazing promises? Paul does not leave us to guess: *“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord.”* Don’t let earthly goals and aspirations seduce you into forgetting that Jesus is your Lord. Don’t let political loyalties usurp your loyalty to Jesus as your true Savior. Stay true to Him: stand firm in



His promises and stay faithful in your service to Him. Take heart from others, like Paul, who have lived this way (see Philippians 3:17). You will never regret it!

*Lord Jesus, thank You for being a Savior more amazing than I could have ever imagined. Thank You for saving me from the guilt of my many sins which made me deserving of Your righteous condemnation. Thank You for Your promise to return to complete the salvation You have already begun in me. Help me in the meantime, Lord, to stay true to You. Help me to stay on Your path and serve You today and tomorrow, and until I see You face to face.*

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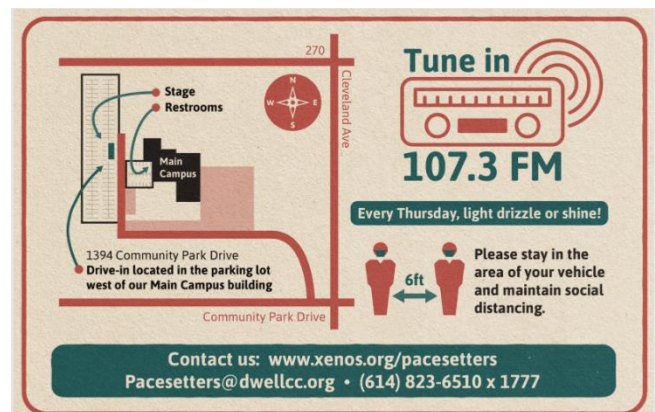


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