

## Our Citizenship is in Heaven <sup>1</sup>

✦ **Press on to the goal.** (vv.12-16)

✦ **Eagerly waiting for our Savior.** (vv.17-21)

In the Name of God's Son, the greatest Gift of Grace, dearly redeemed citizens of heaven:

It's hard to believe, but back in his early days as Saul of Tarsus, the Lord's Apostle Paul was as violent as the renters in Jesus' Parable of the Wicked Tenants. (Gospel – Matthew 21:33-43) After centuries of rejecting His prophets, God finally sent His only begotten Son, but they killed Him too. As far as Saul was concerned, Jesus of Nazareth deserved to die as an imposter. Saul insisted anyone who followed Jesus should be arrested and executed for blasphemy. Saul was on a journey to arrest more Christians when the crucified and risen Jesus appeared to him as the victorious Christ of God. Instead of destroying Saul, Jesus led him to repentance and called Saul to become Paul, the great missionary to the Gentiles, non-Jews like us. Paul was so grateful for God's grace, that he willingly suffered the rest of his life on missionary journeys to places like Philippi. For Roman legionnaires there, citizenship was a big part of their retirement package. Grateful for God's reckless patience, Paul declares: **Our Citizenship is in Heaven.** So, now...

✦ **Press on to the goal.** (vv.12-16)

From prison in Rome, Paul writes to the Philippians to ***“rejoice in the Lord.”*** He warns that the Jewish enemies of Jesus are still actively persecuting Christians just as he had done. Zeal for persecution, once ***blameless*** in his Pharisaic self-righteousness, Paul now considers his early life wasted, ***a loss...rubbish*** compared to the ***righteousness*** God gives by faith in Jesus. Now Paul wants to ***know*** Christ by experience, sharing in ***the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, in the hope that in some way I may arrive at the resurrection from the dead.*** (3:1-11 EHV) Heaven is his **goal**.

***“Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus also took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it yet, but there is one thing I do: Forgetting the things that are behind and straining toward the things that are ahead, I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”***

**Our Citizenship is in Heaven**, but we're not there yet. We're still in the war zone, fighting the good fight of faith with the evil foe. Satan lost his weapons of fear and death when Jesus died and rose again. This world chooses the losing side of history while claiming the win. As your earth-bound sinful nature keeps swerving back into worldly things, **Press on to the goal**. My sinful nature always wants to dwell on the past, remembering all past hurts, abuse, ingratitude for my best efforts. My sinful nature keeps caressing my pride. But since **Our Citizenship is Heaven**, I want to forget all that, drown my sinful pride by contrition and repentance. **Press on to the goal** of that **prize** of eternal life as God calls us **upward**.

Pastor Paul knows some parishioners are still stuck in worldly goals that keep them bouncing around like balloons running out of gas. ***“Therefore, let all of us who are mature continue to think about the goal of heaven. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this to you too. Only let us think the same thing and walk in line with what we already have attained.”*** (15f EHV) Now live up to your role as citizens of heaven, thinking **the same thing**. Live differently, bearing fruits of faith in eternal hope.

By faith in Jesus, we already have eternal life, bought and paid for by His holy, precious blood and guaranteed by His glorious resurrection. **Righteousness** from God counts forever. So, don't give up on it.

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<sup>1</sup> 2023 WELS Worship Foundations series: *TELL US A STORY: A Story of Reckless Patience.*

God's reckless patience found you along with other tenants to work His vineyard, bearing rich fruit for eternal life. ***"I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing."*** (John 15:5 EHV) Staying close to Jesus in His Word and sacraments, yields bushels of ***love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*** (Galatians 5:22f NIV84) Since **Our Citizenship is in Heaven**, always keep...

### ✦ **Eagerly waiting for our Savior. (vv.17-21)**

Paul's letter to the Philippians is written to brothers and sisters, men and women of the congregation. But the dear Holy Spirit stresses the prime responsibility of Christian men to serve in love as Christlike leaders, reporting directly to God almighty. ***"Brothers, join together in imitating me and paying attention to those walking according to the pattern we gave you."*** Discernment is required to follow Christ in this godless age. Some business principles may be applicable to Christ's Church on earth, but beware of worldly thinking. God is not bound by hardcore banking rules of every +/- bottom line ledger. While the world exhausts itself as ***enemies of the cross of Christ***, you give your firstfruits to God in thanks for His blessings. Then He pours out more on you to not only pay your bills, but to help friends and family in need. Everyone is busy, but as you prioritize the kingdom of God and seek first His righteousness, Jesus' promise comes true again and again: ***"All these things will be added to you as well."*** (Matthew 6:33 TPA) With heaven as our home, we can afford to be generous with all that God gives us, building for time and eternity.

You feel Paul's pain here too. It's the cross we bear as we follow Christ. Many loved ones turn away from this great, Good News though Jesus died for them too. God does not discriminate. When He raised Jesus from the dead, God put up a huge sign for all travelers: ***"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. And he has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, inasmuch as God is making an appeal through us. We urge you, on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him."*** (2 Corinthians 5:19-21 EHV)

In tears Paul points out ***enemies of the cross....Their end is destruction, their god is their appetite, and their glory is in their shame. They are thinking only about earthly things.***" (19) All they want is everything for themselves, personal pleasures, their own needs, their own glory in shameful behavior and greed. God's people think above and beyond as God lifts us up with His ***upward call.***

***"Our citizenship is in heaven. We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. By the power that enables him to subject all things to himself, he will transform our humble bodies to be like his glorious body."*** (20f EHV) No longer bound by time and space, able to eat, but not able to die or get sick or suffer sorrow. Our eternal homeland has no more death or mourning or crying or pain. Our glorified bodies will live like Jesus' glorious body, in every way fit for bliss in paradise with God.

How does the hereafter affect our life here on earth? Think back on Jesus' Parable of the Wicked Tenants. What landowner would keep sending more servants to be seized, beaten, and killed? Who would send one more, thinking, ***"They will respect my son"***? God did all that in reckless patience in order to save us from sin, death and hell, for eternity with God as citizens of heaven.

And that's the way the Philippians lived like no one else. **Eagerly waiting for our Savior**, they kept sending Paul aid again and again. In fact, the Philippians were suffering severe persecution and poverty at the same time sending mission offerings and personal assistants who ministered to Paul along the way.

Brothers and sisters of Jesus, **Our Citizenship is in Heaven!** As we **Press on to the goal, Eagerly waiting for our Savior**, is there any reason to fear we will not have enough to pay our earthly bills if we give God the firstfruits? And when God pours out extra blessings, do we have to fear any lack of resources for our own building projects and local ministry? In truth, New Life is built on reckless patience in Christ alone. Due diligence? Yes, but not fear. Careful planning? Yes, but in love. God's reckless patience may look like reckless love in us, but God is greater than all. And we are bound for glory. Amen.

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