

Living as Gospel Citizens

Sunday Morning- June 18, 2017

Phil. 1

Also, wanted to wish our dads a happy Father's Day. I hope your kids went out and mowed the lawn for you. While being a father often has its weary days, *rejoice* in the position that God has placed you. You have an opportunity to influence your children for good. Looking back now, I can see so many things that I borrowed and want to imitate from my dad. He is patient, he loves to laugh, and he cares deeply about his children. He prioritized the church – he led his family to worship God every week faithfully. Those things greatly influenced me. Fathers, you have a wonderful, God-ordained role. Let me encourage you dads to be an influencer for God and for good to your children and family.

Introduction: I don't know about you, but I often grow weary of the news. This is a change for me – as a teenager, I loved following the news. I might have been the only guy my age doing this, but watching "World News Tonight with Peter Jennings" was appointment television for me. Now, not so much anymore. Every day, I see the headlines, and it seems like each time there is no such thing as a calm day in the news. Phrases like, "New revelations", "serious allegations", "leaked memos", or "unnamed sources say" (have you heard those things before?) – those types of sensational stories hit you over and over again. It seems like there is always breaking news.

It seems that our country is polarized more than ever before. So many take such staunch stands on every single issue. Protests, screaming, and yelling have taken the place of dialogue. Some social experts have even coined a new phrase for this – the people of today have been dubbed the "shouting class." Rather than discussing an issue, the "shouting class" hurl insults with such animosity it gives little chance for meaningful conversation. Even just a few days ago, a shooting occurred where people appeared to be targeted for their political beliefs.

I have often thought or maybe just hoped – we are better than this, right? We can still be kind and care and love people, even if they support the other political party, right?

In a time where there seems to be verbal, social, and political grenades going off all around us, how do we survive? How do we identify truth around us? How do we face opposition? Brian mentioned last week that Senator Bernie

Sanders said during a hearing that to hold orthodox Christian beliefs is an un-American perspective and to work in the government of the United States believing that Jesus is the only way to salvation is not what this country is about. To be very clear - the truth of God and the American way are growing farther and farther apart. How do we live, and live well as followers of Jesus? Brothers and sisters, we need a strategy, or we will fail. With messages and beliefs being launched at us from all angles, we need to intentionally plan and prepare how to live.

Well, I have good news for us today! I am firmly convinced hope and answers to these questions are found in the Book. Turn with me to Philippians 1. There are Bibles in the pews racks in front of you; if you are watching in the Awana Room, there are Bibles in the chairs in front of you. Philippians 1 is on page 980. The Apostle Paul is writing to the church in Philippi. He is encouraging them to live their lives committed to God – in the midst of opposition and turmoil. He gives them some motivation to do this that I believe is cheering and promising. *Let's read vs. 27-30.*

Did you notice how Paul began this paragraph? He begins with the word *only*. This is really big clue on what Paul wants us to do – it should cause us to pay attention. There's isn't much else. This is it. The *only* could be a restrictive word. Teens and kids, maybe your parents have told you, "The *only* thing you will be doing this afternoon is sitting in your room and thinking about what you did wrong." That's a bummer, right? But *only* could be a freeing word. If my wife asked, "George, the *only* thing you need to do before you watch the game is please load the dishwasher." I'm leaping over the couch to scrub some plates. It's all I need to do. I believe this word *only* we find here is freeing.

If this is only what God wants us to do, then it seems pretty important for us to have a good handle on what he only wants us to do.

Paul says, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ." Your "manner of life" or the way you behave or conduct yourself. Or the possibly best way to say it, might be found in your ESV footnote after the word "worthy" – it says "only behave as **citizens** worthy of the gospel of Christ." This is what Paul is getting at – he is getting at this idea of being a citizen.

We need to live life as worthy citizens of the gospel. Let me say this again – we need to live life as worthy citizens of the gospel. Living life as gospel citizens. Behaving as citizens worthy of the gospel.

But Paul does not stop there with this citizen idea. Paul says it another way in Phil. 3:20. Flip over a page to chapter 3. It says the believer's citizenship is in heaven. The believer is a citizen of heaven. Now, we have to understand a few things. One, as much as I love I living in Medford, it is not heaven. There are a few days where it gets a little too cold for me, mosquitos like to bite my wife, and with Kmart and Little Caesar's closing, I don't have a place to get a cheap pizza! Now, I joke a little bit here, but Paul says the follower of Jesus has citizenship in heaven, but, as can tell, we clearly aren't there yet. So while believers are not in heaven yet, they do have some heavenly citizen responsibilities. The believer is on assignment on earth – while we should proudly be citizens of our country, our ultimate focus belongs to our God in heaven. We could really think of our FBC as a little outpost or a little colony representing Jesus.

What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven or a gospel citizen? Well, first let's get a quick picture of what it meant to be a citizen back in Paul's day when he was writing to the Philippians.

- The city of Philippi is located in what is now modern day Greece. It came under Roman rule about 200 years before Paul wrote his letter, but only a few decades before Paul's time, the Philippians were able to be granted Roman citizenship. Being a citizen of Roman Empire was full of privilege and benefit – you could vote, you could easily conduct business, and you were guaranteed the right to a free trial. It was an honor to be a citizen of Rome. It was treasured. It was valued. Not everyone could claim to be a citizen – perhaps as little as 15% of people living in the empire were citizens. And to be a Roman citizen – an official part of the globe's strongest, most powerful empire. The known world was ruled by Rome – and to be one of its citizens was special. Philippi was a military colony and full of Roman veterans and families. People that had fought for Rome and were loyal to it. They loved their citizenship; they were proud to be a part of Rome.
- Now take those ideas and ponder being a gospel citizen. Their loyalty and commitment was not to a king, but to the King of Kings. A heavenly citizen or a gospel citizen pledges to follow their God above all else. *Being a gospel citizen is special* – not everyone has citizenship – only those that believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Not only is being a gospel citizen special, the benefits of being a citizen of heaven far outstrip any country or man can offer us – being a gospel citizen **changes everything about you.**
 - It changes your past. As a follower and believer of Jesus and his gospel, all the sins that you have ever committed have been forgiven. You have been pardoned from all crimes against God.

God will not remember any of sins. Hebrews 8:12 says, For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." This is a breathtaking benefit of gospel citizenship. If you think of your worst sins, all of us would be disgusted and embarrassed if everyone saw the worst of what we have done. But God *has* seen everything you have done, and he chooses to offer forgiveness and invites you to become a gospel citizen. In addition to this forgiveness, the follower of God has Jesus' righteousness draped all over them. In the Creator God's eyes, you are no longer a sinner, but you have the perfection and work of Jesus covering you. The gospel changes your past.

- Being a gospel citizen changes your present. Right now, every follower of Jesus has access to the Creator God. You have a relationship with Jesus. The Holy Spirit dwells in the believer, comforting and guiding them. Every moment of your life, God does not leave you because you have been adopted into the family of God. As follower of Jesus, you belong to his family and there is nothing that you can do to break that familial bond.
- Being a gospel citizen changes your future. The eternal destination of the soul changes. The believer is no longer destined to an eternity separated from God, but rather, rejoicing, praising, and relishing no more sin, no more pain, and no more death. The citizen has now reached the home country of heaven. You report in to your God on how you have lived for him. They get to meet the King face to face. This is your citizenship, and it is astounding. Believer, do not underestimate the value of your gospel citizenship.
- However, the idea of being a heavenly citizen and living like one is often disregarded. We choose not to value it. We place our allegiance in other things. We live not for the eternal God of heaven but for temporary things of earth. And make no mistake about it, our earthly citizenship has a strong draw.
 - I have a certain weakness – it's called Moose Tracks ice cream. I love Moose Tracks, but I know that it does not often fit in my diet plan. In order to avoid large Moose Tracks consumption, I don't go down the ice cream aisle at the grocery store (neither do I glance down Aisle 3 on the left hand side on the second shelf where it's located). But sometimes, I say, "George, you have worked hard this week. You deserve this. And sometimes, I will make a deal with myself. George, if you buy this ice

cream, you will promise to only have a little bit each day so it won't be so bad." Twenty four to forty eight hours later, I am staring at an empty Moose Tracks carton, with a little chocolate sauce dribbling down my chin. It was so good when I was eating it, but I know that may have not been the best decision for me.

- How quickly do we push away our gospel citizenship for something seemingly more attractive? Children, maybe it is disobeying your mom by heading over to your neighbor's house when she tells you to clean your room. You chose not be loyal to God's command of obeying your parents, but rather you chose to be loyal to what you wanted. Teens, maybe hopping in the car with those high school buddies that are drinking beers will make you feel like you belong, but you have quickly forgotten that every child of God already belongs to him. College students, the summer is here. Perhaps you are planning for a summer that is filled with making some money, relaxing, and making sure you get some "me" time after several months of study and activity. And, now, you realize that it has been a month since you have been home, and you realize your time with God has gone out the window. Studying his word, talking to God, and serving him – you communication with God has taken a hit. Adults, bad mouthing the boss to a co-worker will make you feel good for a little while, but we forget so quickly the love that God showed us and find it difficult to show that same love to others. When faced with a health concern or money shortage, we find it so easy and simple to complain and grumble about our circumstances, rather than pray and trust a God who has control of every situation you have ever faced.

We see that the temptation to disregard our gospel citizen is powerful, so how do we live as gospel citizens? Well, we live according to his Word. We do what he says. We have a guide to live well as a gospel citizen. Everything you do reflects well or poorly on your God. For instance, the motto for the US Marines is Semper Fi. It means "Always Faithful." Everything that a Marine does in combat is supposed to reflect faithfulness to his country and to his fellow soldiers. Everything a believer does is supposed reflect well on God.

The passage in Philippians 1 discusses how we are supposed to interact with other gospel citizens. Paul realizes that we don't live in a vacuum – people are all around us. We live as worthy citizens of the gospel so we might stand firm

together, and we as a church might be unified in the gospel. Paul says in this passage to stand firm and strive side by side. There is great relief and encouragement in serving Christ together.

How does this play out? One of the biggest encouragements to me is during our youth group time on Wednesday. Many of you aren't able to see what happens, so let me describe it. After I teach our lesson, the teens and leaders often break in to small groups to study Bible passages, apply them, and pray together. It is a wonderful thing to see 7 or 8 adults going full steam the same direction teaching and instructing Jesus to these young people. What unifies us? We all believe and want to see the gospel sent out. I am sure many of our Awana volunteers see the same thing – many volunteers unified for a common goal. Also, for the past year, Melissa and I have been amazed at the unity of this church pursuing this new church building. Why is there such unity? Because I believe this body wants to see God's name lifted up and the gospel proclaimed around Taylor County. Brothers and sisters, the gospel is a powerful unifier. So realize if and when disagreements come our group of citizens, choose to focus on the wonderful things that unite us rather than the things that narrowly attempt to divide us.

How should we view being citizens of heaven? It should give us great joy. We belong to someone far greater than anything we could obtain here.

The gospel should motivate us to live as worthy citizens of heaven. This gospel – that God created the world as a holy and perfect God. But man is a sinner and has broken God's laws many times over. A holy and perfect God and a sinful man? That's a large gap. So Jesus came to be our Savior – living a perfect life, dying on the cross for man's sins and rising from the grave to defeat death. This amazing gift bridges the gap. What do we accept our this gift? With a response of faith believing that Jesus is enough to save to save me and repenting of my sins and following God. This is the gospel, and it is some motivation to live as worthy citizen.

Application: FBC – stand firm in the gospel together. Like Paul said, stand unified striving together for the good news. What does this mean for us? Striving together means that there is some effort involved. Working. Serving. Are you serving well as a gospel citizen? There are many opportunities for you to serve this community through this church.

Is your focus on striving first for the gospel? Do you represent well as a gospel citizen your God while on the job? Do the words you use with your co-workers reflect your God?

Know that being a gospel citizen will not be easy. The passage we discussed this morning talked of “opposition” and things that could frighten believers, and suffering for God’s sake. A gospel citizen will face conflict because the gospel tells people they are not okay. It tells us that what you are doing now is not good enough. The gospel tells us that we have fallen far short of God, and we need rescuing. And while we speak the truth in love, many will angrily reject the gospel. It happened in Paul’s day, it has happened for the past two thousand years, and it is happening now. So, my fellow believers, be prepared for conflict as we labor as an outpost of the heavenly colony that has been set up in Medford, Wisconsin. And when the times comes that we may suffer for what we believe and teach, I am reminded of Acts 5. The apostles were arrested and ordered not to teach of Jesus. The authorities didn’t want them filling the city with this type of talk. But the apostles replied that they wanted to obey God rather than man. The authorities were enraged at their disobedience. They wanted to kill the apostles, but were persuaded only to beat them and tell them to stop teaching of Jesus. What would these men do after receiving a beating? *Verse 41 “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.”* The name of Jesus. Do you see what citizenship they valued more?

In a world that increasingly opposed to the gospel teaching of Jesus Christ, be all about living life as a gospel citizen – whether it be in your house, in your workplace, and in your relationships. In spite of opposition and suffering First Baptist, be encouraged by a marvelous God who has offered you marvelous citizenship through his good work. May there be no higher priority in your life than serving Jesus and giving him glory.

We can’t do this in our own strength. We need his grace to defeat temptation, live for our God, remembering we have a responsibility to live life as a gospel citizen.

Let’s ask for his help right now. Let’s pray.