

Kingdom Citizenship, Part 1

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 September 2024

Preacher: Kevin Smith, Senior Pastor

[0 : 00] We are continuing in our series in the Kingdom Focused Church, and we're in a new passage this morning that we'll be looking at for the next couple of Sundays.

Philippians chapter 3, verses 20 through chapter 4, verse 1. It's only a few verses, but they pack quite a punch.

And I pray the Lord would bless you as we look at them. They speak to our time in a very significant way, what I never thought of before.

And I pray you'll see what I'm saying. Father, as we come to your word now, we ask for help. For Lord, we need to hear what you have to say.

And we need to hear it clearly stated. So, Father, anoint me to make it plain, to make it clear, so that your people hear from you, and that they can know how to govern themselves, that they can see Jesus.

[1 : 06] Oh, that they can see Jesus. And all that he is for us. Oh, Lord, so please. Pour out your spirit to make this so, please.

And we will leave this place changed because we've been in your presence. Thank you for your love and your faithfulness.

Thank you that you reign. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Philippians chapter 3, beginning at verse 20.

But our citizenship is in heaven. And from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

[2 : 15] That is the word of the Lord. Thank you, God. Please be seated. Thank you, Christy. Thank you, God. Thank you, Christy.

A nation grants certain rights and privileges to its citizens. In return, citizens are expected to obey their country's laws and defend it against its enemies.

In general, full political rights, including a right to vote and to hold public office, are predicated upon citizenship.

During the swearing-in ceremony, when people immigrate to our country and want to be citizens, they take what's called the oath of allegiance, and they end with the pledge of allegiance.

Here's the oath of allegiance. I hereby declare on oath that I am absolutely, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or a citizen.

[4 : 11] Old life is gone, as it were. Old allegiance is gone. That I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

That I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same. That I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law. That I will perform non-combatant service in the armed forces of the United States when required by the law.

That I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law.

And that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion.

So help me God. It's interesting that the oath of allegiance and the pledge of allegiance both reference God.

Now we have to understand today that means God and how you understand him or her or it. That's what it means today.

[5 : 26] We as Christians understand who God is. So I'm not falling for that. The only way you can be released from these oaths is in death. After the ceremony, you are given a certificate of naturalization saying that you have become a U.S. citizen.

It functions similar to what a birth certificate would be. As many of us, most of you know, my wife Sandra is from Jamaica, West Indies. And she and her family, when they were little, became citizens of this country.

And if you know my wife, you know she will always love Jamaica and Jamaican culture. I'm an honorary Jamaican. But my wife is not a dual citizen.

Dual citizens have divided loyalties. And from my understanding, they are actually more accountable to the country in which they reside, which they live. She's a full American of Jamaican descent.

American of Jamaican descent. American. Okay. Spiritually, those who follow Jesus were full citizens of the kingdom of darkness.

[6 : 49] But we are now full citizens of the kingdom of God. We were rescued and delivered from bondage to sin and death by the cross of the glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

We are not dual citizens. We are Christians of American descent. Can I say that again? We are Christians of American descent.

The kingdom of Christ and its king are everything to us. Or they are nothing. When we become Christians through faith in what Christ has done for us at the cross and repentance of our sins in order to follow Jesus, we are as it, we as it were, took the oath and pledge of our allegiance to the cross of the kingdom of God and its king.

When you said yes to Jesus, in faith, you became a citizen of the kingdom. And you pledged your life and all that you are and all that you have to the service of that kingdom and its king.

Your spiritual certificate of naturalization is what you just saw me hand to the Russell family. It is your baptismal certificate.

[8 : 24] It is your spirit. It is your spirit. It is your spirit. It is your spirit. But unlike being an American citizen, which is temporary, because you do die, as it were, you have no more commitments at that point.

But this commitment to the kingdom of God is an eternal commitment going beyond death that overrides all other commitments.

Too many of us as Christians are getting our loyalties confused. And when we do that, that distorts and maybe even destroys our witness and causes division within our churches.

Can I ask you some questions? What does your spiritual certificate of naturalization say? What does your spiritual passport say?

Does it say kingdom of God or something else? Are you trying to be a dual citizen? Do you understand what it means to be a Christian and to be a citizen of the kingdom of God?

[9 : 54] Now, I'm going to spend my time doing some spade work this morning, so we're not going to get to the depth of what I want to say. But the spade work is important. The setup is important. Extremely important.

We have to ask ourselves, why does Paul speak of kingdom citizenship in this letter and in this spot? Why does he do that? That's how you do Bible study. You ask questions like that.

First of all, who are the Philippians? Now, in Luke chapter 16, which if you want to use the Pew Bible, is on page 925. In Luke chapter 16, Luke records the planting of the church at Philippi by the apostle.

He writes that Paul received a vision in which, I'm sorry, what did I say? Thank you. Luke records in Acts.

Excuse me. Luke records in Acts 16. Thank you very much. Acts 16 is page 925. Paul received a vision in which he saw a man from Macedonia, which is where Philippi was located, urging him to come over to Macedonia and help them.

[11 : 02] He concluded that God was calling him to preach the gospel in that region. You'll see that in chapter 16 of Acts, verses 8 through 11.

Luke says, they went to Philippi, and he says this, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, listen, and a Roman colony.

It is the fact that it is a Roman colony that is extremely important. Caesar Augustus seems to have named this city.

He, Caesar Augustus, and other Caesars were called Lord and Savior. He was called Lord and Savior after he defeated Mark Antony in a civil war.

Because by defeating Mark Antony, he restored peace and security to the Roman world. It was called the Pax Romana or Roman peace.

[11 : 58] That Roman peace enabled social and economic recovery of the land. Philippi then became a city where the Roman aristocracy flourished.

Romans were given allotments there. The citizens of Philippi enjoyed all the privileges and rights of Roman citizens as if they were on Italian soil.

They were exempt from taxes. I like that already. Can we sign up for that one? They were exempt from taxes, and they were governed by Roman law. And listen, though there were many temples and many gods in that city, it was the imperial cult that was most prominent.

Worship of the emperor. Altars and temples were dedicated to the emperor and members of his family, including Augustus' wife, Livia, who was very well regarded and worshipped as a goddess. Walter Hanson in his commentary on here says this, Put it this way.

[13 : 15] Put it this way. If you stop worshipping the emperor, you were treasonous. You were in trouble. Now, if you go back to Acts 16, when Paul began this church by meeting a woman named Lydia, and the Bible says God opened her heart.

See, once again, the work of God. If God doesn't open your heart, you can't see. God opened her heart to believe the gospel, and the church started in her home. Thereafter, Paul is going into the city.

He's going around the city, and a young girl is making money for her master. She's being trafficked. She's making money for her master by having a fortune-telling spirit in her.

Now, fortune-tellingists many times today are just tricking you. But in this case, this person was demonized. She had a spirit of the devil in her.

Here's Acts 16, 1924. Paul cast a spirit out of her, by the way. But when her owner saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas, his boy Silas with him, and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.

[14 : 35] And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.

They held Paul and Silas up as they preached the gospel of faith in Jesus. Because they held them up as lawbreakers in their city.

Roman lawbreakers, because remember, they were a colony of Rome. They said the gospel was treasonous. Hmm.

The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer, the Philippian jailer, to keep them safely.

Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. Now these guys are hurting. Their backs are raw. I wouldn't be surprised if they had a few cracked ribs.

[15 : 55] And they put them in the stocks. Their feet are bound together. And they're very, extremely uncomfortable. The text, if you were to read it, they begin singing, singing praise to God.

What a thought. In the midst of such pain and shame, they're singing praise to Jesus. They get out. You can read it for yourself. But later, when Paul and Silas reveal, listen, that they too were Roman citizens, the magistrates got afraid and apologized because they should not have beaten and jailed them without a trial.

And they escorted them out of the city. Paul made them do it. He said, you tell them to come here and escort us out, because we're Roman citizens. This is how Philippi, the church at Philippi, was started.

That's where the journey begins. In this book, Paul is in prison. Okay? He's in prison. This is his most joyful letter, every scholar who studies it says.

[17 : 04] But he's in prison. He's writing to encourage these Philippian Christians, who are now experiencing some persecution like he did. He's writing to encourage them, to let them know that there's something more important than even breathing on this earth.

The psalmist said, your love is better than life. Psalm 63, therefore my lips will praise you.

They understood that. In this chapter, Paul is focusing their hearts upon Christ and what they have in him, and therefore to rejoice no matter what they are experiencing.

Why? Because they are citizens of a better and more powerful country with the king of kings as their savior. Verses 17 through 19 in chapter 3 kind of set the stage.

Here's what it says. Brothers, join in imitating me. Keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

[18:17] Their end is destruction. Their God is their belly. And they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things. That's the immediate context of our verses.

Those words are striking. Because I think he's talking about people who call themselves Christians. Who were in the church at Philippi. Or were in the church at Philippi.

Paul says, imitate me. Follow me as I follow Christ. He's warning them with tears. Because some of these dear folk who said they believe in Jesus are now really destined still for destruction.

Hell. He says their true God is their belly. Idolatry of comfort. They glory in their shame.

That means that which they should have been ashamed of gives them pride. Their minds are set on earthly things. Meaning they are more concerned about the things of this world than the kingdom of God.

[19:28] Here's what I think. Based upon the context of chapter 3 in particular. Some of them viewed Roman citizenship.

Or in the case of Jewish Christians. They viewed their ethnic identity as more important and privilege than their kingdom citizenship and identity.

It was more important to them to be a citizen of Rome than to be a citizen of the kingdom. It was more important to them to be Jewish than to be a citizen of the kingdom.

That's why Paul in the early part of this chapter says he count all things lost. Including his ethnic identity. He counts all things lost for the sake of Christ. You see what happened was.

Suffering came upon them. Because they were part of their church. And suffering was not part of the deal for them.

[20:32] Comfort is more important. Me and my kids. Me and my family. That's more important than the kingdom. It wasn't part of the deal.

They begin to back away. Or they begin to become dual citizens. I think it was the great philosopher Mike Tyson who said.

Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth. They had a plan. But then they got punched in the mouth by the world. And then they changed their story.

Things begin to morph. Loyalties began to get blurred. So point one.

We must see ourselves as citizens of the kingdom of God. Amen. Rome was viewed as the greatest nation and empire of that day. Truly there was nothing like it in history up to that point.

[21:38] As we saw to be a citizen of Rome was a great privilege with benefits. David Nystrom writes, Romans claimed a divine commission to conquer and civilize.

That's his book, Jesus is Lord, Caesar is not. What a title. Romans claimed a divine commission to conquer and civilize the world.

They saw their way of life as superior to other forms of human culture. I guess we can call that Roman exceptionalism.

Can I say that right? Roman exceptionalism. You've heard that verse before, I'm sure. In Acts 22, Paul talks about how he was born a citizen.

And the Roman soldier who was interviewing him said, I bought my citizenship with a large sum of money. That's how important it was to be a Roman citizen.

[22:39] They paid money to be counted as part of the Roman community. So there's great pride and status there. But now they have become Christians.

They've become followers of Jesus. And he came to reveal another kingdom. Daniel chapter 7.

Daniel is given a prophecy of the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms.

But that another kingdom would rise in the midst of them. That would conquer them all and never end. The eternal kingdom that Daniel predicted is revealed in Jesus, the eternal king of that kingdom.

King Jesus has admitted those who trust in him into his glorious kingdom. Though they remain citizens of Rome and of the U.S. physically, another kingdom, the kingdom of heaven or the

kingdom of God, now rules their hearts and lives.

So they must now live according to the dictates, laws, customs, and priorities of the new kingdom. Rome no longer has their ultimate loyalty and concern.

[24 : 01] Talk more about that next time or in the next couple weeks. This is why our Lord uttered those famous words we've been saying over and over again. Matthew 6.33.

Seek first the kingdom of God. Seek first. Seek priority. First loyalty. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And he says, and all these things that we need in that chapter will be added to you.

You see, Paul's command here, Paul's words here reject nationalism. What is nationalism?

Loyalty and devotion to a nation especially as expressed in a glorifying of one nation above all others and a stressing of the promotion of that nation's culture and interests.

Now there are positive aspects to nationalism. Patriotism can be positive. National promotes a sense of identity.

[25 : 04] Unites people. Promotes pride. In a good sense, pride. What are the negative outcomes of nationalism? Leads to conflict with others. Infringes on rights of others.

Creates xenophobia. Xenophobia means fear of foreigners. And people from different cultures. Fear of strangers. And that fear, and in that fear, that someone will take them over.

You see, we're followers of Jesus. We can't give in to the negative aspects of nationalism. Nor can we allow the positive aspects to rule our hearts.

Nationalism is idolatry. And this is where we are right now. This is a strange and huge temptation in our presidential elections especially.

We fall into it. Some advocate a belief that America is chosen by God in a covenant to be his agent in the world. American exceptionalism.

[26 : 21] American exceptionalism. American exceptionalism. You sound just like Rome. Disbelief makes America right. And without us, liberty in the world, including the cause of Christ, would be destroyed or greatly hindered.

Christian nationalism. You probably heard this slogan. God in country. God in country.

I suggest to you that too often we put the loyalty on country and the loyalty on God on the same level. God in country.

God in country. It's not this. It's this. God in country. And what that can end up mean, what that can end up doing then is that loyalty to country means loyalty to God.

Or loyalty to God means loyalty to country. That's what happens when you put God and country on the same level. Now, everybody who says that doesn't mean this.

[27 : 27] I understand that. I'm just saying this is where we slide way too easily. And we have. It's just watch the news. Watch social media.

The apostle would object to all of this. Because our citizenship in heaven demands our first and supreme loyalty because we have been saved by its divine king.

All right. Let's wrap this up. I'm just setting the stage. This is all background, okay? Because you are. And if you take what I just said and read the text again, you're already going to start seeing what Paul is saying.

So let's wrap this up. Look, we as followers of Jesus are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. But we live and work in the United States of America.

Our passport says K-O-G or K-O-H. Kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven. This suggests to me that we can do all we can for the good and flourishing of our country.

[28 : 38] Yes, we can. And we must. Seek the peace and the prosperity of the city, of the nation. We're going to talk more about what it means to be exiles.

We'll get there. We'll get there. But yes, we are to seek the flourishing of our country and our communities and our cities. But at the same time, we must realize our ultimate destiny is not tied to America's identity.

This will free you up. And we'll free us all up to be at peace no matter who wins elections in this country or in other countries' elections.

It allows me to do my best but put America in God's hands, trusting his plan for the nations. And keep in mind that the nations will be conquered by Jesus according to Daniel 7 and Revelation.

The nations will be conquered by Jesus. And family, that includes America. We will be conquered because we are not God's people as a nation.

[30 : 00] Only one nation has ever been in covenant with God and we call that nation Israel. Israel. Nobody else.

Nobody else. All nations are fallen. And in general, are antichrist.

The darkness is real. We're seeing it even more now in this country, are we not? It's always been here.

It's always been here. It's always been here. The restraints are coming off. But fear not.

King Jesus is still reigning. I don't need to give in to the rhetoric of politicians and the media and attack people who think differently than I do.

[31 : 07] I don't have to do that. I can disagree with people with, as Peter says in 1 Peter, with gentleness and respect, giving them a reason for the hope that I have.

This is where, and see, listen, when you don't understand this, what Paul is saying, when you don't understand these things, you cannot speak civilly to those who disagree with you.

You find yourself in rage and angry with the liberals or rage and angry with the conservatives. How can they be Christians and vote for a liberal?

How can they be Christians and vote for a conservative? And you find yourself caught up in that.

That's the world's way of thinking. You've forgotten that your kingdom is not of this world.

That's what Jesus said. You've forgotten. You've forgotten. And so therefore, what happens is, as we bicker and fight with each other, we're not known for our love and faith.

[32 : 17] The word evangelical means something. It means a commitment to the gospel, the euangelion, the evangel. We are committed to the gospel.

It means that we believe that you must put your faith in Jesus and personally put your faith in Jesus. It means we believe the Bible is the word of God.

These are good things. But today, the word evangelical, no one sees it. Very few people see it as referring to what I just said. When you say that word, what does it mean now?

Say it. It means a political party. Yeah, that's right. Really? Paul is rolling over in his grave.

When you understand what kingdom you are committed to, you don't have to lose sleep.

[33 : 19] You don't have to be enraged. You can speak to people who disagree with you. You can try to point them to things you believe are right and correct.

Amen to that. But please base what you believe on the scripture and not on the talking heads. What a witness to the reality of Jesus if Christians in this country saw ourselves as citizens of the kingdom of God more than citizens of America.

What would happen? People would see Jesus again. In us. They would see a community of believers who vote differently, who are different ethnicities, different social economic standing.

They would see believers from different nations even. Some have become citizens of this country. Some have not yet. But they're all together. And they would see us loving each other.

And caring for each other. And even having, listen, here we go, friendly debate. About the issues. And not about the personalities.

[34 : 46] Too many of us want to be citizens of Rome. We want to live in Babylon. We want to be committed to a geopolitical entity more so than a theopolitical entity.

Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right.

Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right.

Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right.

Right. Right. Right. Right. Right. Right.

Right. Right. emperor. The good news. It was used to say that a general has won the battle and is now coming back in having triumph. That was gospel.

[35 : 47] So when the Christians took that word, that same word and used it for Jesus, they were making a political statement. Why do you think King Herod wanted to put baby Jesus to death? He didn't want to kill him because he was afraid people would have set Jesus into their hearts.

He wanted to kill him because he was being born a rival king. It was political. The Christian faith is highly political.

I got, there's more. I can tell you, I'm saving some, I'm holding some back. Just come back next week.

If I'm here, Lord willing, the rapture hasn't come or I haven't gone to Jesus, we'll get to it.

Understanding these things, family, helps us understand our place and our witness. It gives us peace because our kingdom is secure.

America will never be secure. Never. Because it's people running the show. But the kingdom of God.

[37 : 10] I leave you with the words of one of my favorite verses, Hebrews 12, 28 and 29. It's now on the screen. Here's what the writer of Hebrews says. Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

And thus, let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord our God, the Lord of heaven and earth. The whole earth is full of his glory.

Do you see his glory? Brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, do you see his glory? or are your eyes stuck on who's going to be in the White House and the Supreme Court?

Is that all you see? You'll know because it's all you write about is what you talk about.

[38 : 25] then you'll know what keeps you up at night. Then you'll know where's your heart.

What America needs is Christians who are so heavenly minded they are great earthly good.

Father, help us. I pray, Lord, that though this was not, this is just a stepping stone into the passage.

Father, I pray that even now you begin to work in our hearts and minds.

Cause your people to go back and study. Go back and look for themselves at the history and the text. Help us, Lord, to be like the Bereans to search the scriptures to see whether these things are so.

Take our hearts. Seal it for your courts above. Take our hearts, Lord, and seal it and bind them to Jesus. Bind them to the glory of your kingdom.

[39 : 33] And then set us loose in this country to bear witness to the king and his kingdom. For Jesus' sake we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.