



Sermon: “The Christian Journey - builds Character”
Scripture: *Philippians 3:17- 4:1*
Location: First Presbyterian Church of Lake Mary

Pastor: Hugh Lackey
Occasion: Worship
Date: February 28, 2010

Hear the word of the Lord as I read from Paul’s letter to the Philippian church.

As you listen:

- ✠ Consider the challenge that Paul placed before the members of this church.
- ✠ Consider the challenge that faces us, as members of the church today.
- ✠ Consider what we can and should use as a model as we journey through this world reflecting the character of children of God.
- ✠ Consider your God given citizenship
- ✠ Consider your faith journey and ask if it is helping you grow in character as a citizen of heaven.

¹⁷ Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. 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. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

4 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends! ¹

Harold Reynolds, an ESPN baseball analyst and former second baseman for the Seattle Mariners, once told this story: “When growing up in Corvallis, Oregon, there was an NBA player named Gus Williams. Gus tied his shoes in back instead of front. I thought it was cool. So I started tying my shoes in back. I wanted to be like Gus. He worn number 10; I wore number 10. He wore a wrist band; I wore a wrist band. I wanted to be like Gus.

One day I was lying in bed ill. I noticed that it wasn’t Gus who came to care for me. It was my mother. That is when I began to understand the difference between heroes and role models. I stopped looking at athletic accomplishments to determine who I wanted to pattern my life after.”

In our lesson, this morning, we see Paul, with weeping eyes, challenges his brothers and sisters, in Philippi, to follow his example and to look at others that are living according to that pattern. In the previous chapter he had noted other examples for them to follow, including Timothy and Epaphroditus, who Paul intended to send back to Philippi and, of course he gave the ultimate example, Jesus Christ saying, *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus²*

Paul was concerned about the Philippians’ spiritual warfare. So he made an unabashed invitation for them to imitate him. Paul reflected the character of one that lived a spiritual life verses others who reflected a life *as enemies of the cross of Christ*. We need to remember that the historical and social circumstances of the early church demanded role models and mentors as a means of discerning life’s

¹ *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. electronic ed. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. Php 3:17-4:1

² *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. electronic ed. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. Php 2:5



journey and providing the support to build the proper character. Paul was a model that reflected a citizen of heaven and a man of God, worthy of emulation.

Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians is applicable today, perhaps even more than when he wrote these words. The Christian church is definitely in a spiritual warfare. Here in the United States and even more in Europe the church struggles to maintain the image of a community of saints with citizenship in heaven as it faces *enemies of the cross of Christ*, daily.

John Stott, a contemporary British preacher and evangelist, notes in his book *Basic Christianity*, that “Becoming a Christian is one thing; being a Christian is another.” Stott explained the privileges and responsibilities of a person born into the family of God. The privileges include: An intimate and assured relationship with God. The responsibilities include: our duty to know God’s word and reflect God’s image in our lives; to be part of a community of faith; and live a life that reflects our citizenship as ones born into the Kingdom of heaven.

A survey of Christians found some distressing results:

- 5% of reported church members do not exist;
- 10% cannot be found;
- 20% never pray;
- 25% never read the Bible;
- 30% never attend church;
- 40% never give to any cause;
- 50% never go to Sunday school;
- 70% never give to Missions;
- 75% never engaged in any church activity;
- 90% never have family worship;
- 95% never win a soul to Christ.

—*Crusade Contact*³

Our spiritual warfare, like the Philippians, must begin within the walls of the established church, and we need to ask ourselves if we are living a life in the pattern of Paul. Who is your role model / mentor? We are never too old to learn and role models allow us the opportunity to compare our lifestyle to theirs. As Paul explained our *attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus*.

Life does not allow us to constantly walk on the fence. We end up being on one side or the other. In this case we can either follow Paul’s example or, as he explained, we can *live as enemies of the cross*. The choice we make has a lasting impact. If we chose to live and keep our minds *on earthly things*, our *destiny is destruction*.

Paul’s reference to these enemies of the cross probably referred to followers of Gnosticism, who trusted in their own attainments and not in the sufficiency of Christ alone. Paul indicated that anyone choosing that side of the fence would not be children of God and awaited their own destruction. The Greek word used here for destruction translates as “ruination by separation from the presence of God.” Paul gives three examples of the actions that reflect this attitude:

1. *Their god is their stomach* – they focus on their own physical desires
2. *Their glory is in their shame* – Instead of glorifying God, they heap praise on themselves, about things they should have been ashamed of.

³Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979



3. *Their mind is on earthly things* – While we are expected to care about earthly affairs, this warning was for those who depended on earthly things.

As Stott said, becoming (taking the name of “Christian) is not enough; we have to be a Christian too. How we behave reflects what we believe and this, in turn, reflects where we call home.

The Delta Air Lines reservations office received a call from a troubled dog-owner. “Can I take my dog on the same plane with me?” the woman asked timidly. The agent assured her that she could. Then he asked, “Where do you plan to go?” “Well,” came the worried reply, “I’m thinking about going to Mexico City. What I really want to know is this: if I take my dog with me and she has puppies while we’re down there, will they be American citizens.”
—*Air Travel*⁴

The word citizenship, in Greek, really means, “City resident.” Paul was speaking to citizens of Philippi, but he knew that, as a colony of Rome, they were officially Roman citizens, as he was. They really had dual citizenship. Some of us may have dual citizenship too. For example, Joe Raymond carries two passports; a Bahaman passport because that is the country where he was born and a US Passport. These documents reflect that fact that his name has been added to registry of those countries, and he is recognized as a citizen of each nation. Paul, as scripture records, used his Roman citizenship effectively to reach his goal of visiting Rome.

Paul reminded his Philippians friends that they were also citizens of another place. He said while they live on this earth, by their acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, their real citizenship is elsewhere. Not in Rome, but *our citizenship is in heaven*, he said.

As believers, we have dual citizenship. We may be citizens of the USA, Bahamas, and elsewhere, but our real citizenship is in heaven. I know that because God promised if we accepted and were willing to put our trust in Christ we would be officially registered *in the book of life*.⁵

When I was in business, I traveled extensively, and my passport was my key back home. Upon arrival back in the USA my passport would be checked against the official record to confirm that I was “in the book,” then, with a smile, I would hear “welcome home.” As citizens of heaven, *we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body*

Our key, our passport, so to speak, is Jesus Christ, our Savior. He will come from heaven and transform our earthly existence and make it conform to His divine glory, then He will, with a smile, say “welcome home.”

In the meantime, we are reminded by Paul that we must live a life that emulates Christ’s attitude. While our marching ours, as Christians and as a church, come from elsewhere our lives are clearly rooted in the soil and shifting sands of this world, with all of its social turmoil and personal anguish.

John Wesley once said, “Anything that cools my love for Christ is the world.”

⁴Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979

⁵ *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. electronic ed. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984, S. Php 4:3



William Law warned that the world is now a greater enemy to the Christian than it was in apostolic times: It is a greater enemy, because it has greater power over Christians by its favors, riches, honors, rewards, and protection than it had by the fire and fury of its persecutors. It is a more dangerous enemy, by having lost its appearance of enmity. Its outward profession of Christianity makes it no longer considered as an enemy, and therefore the people are easily persuaded to resign themselves up to be governed and directed by it.⁶

A Christian magazine once noted, “Some folks take up religion as a kind of insurance against hell—and then are not willing to pay the premiums.” You see it is not enough to say we are Christians, as John Stott pointed out, we must also be Christians. A sign in a church vestibule read: “If you were on trial for being Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

Paul’s appeal to the Philippian church (and to us) declares that a thoroughly earthly preoccupation ends in “destruction” – separation from God, whereas a heavenly identity anticipates a beautiful transformation. The result is our ability, and our privilege to hear “welcome home” as we *stand firm in the Lord*.

As Christ-followers we need examples to follow in order to learn the practical lessons of Christ’s lordship in life. We need examples to help us become aware of what it is to be a heavenly citizen residing on earth. We need mentors. We also need to be the example and mentor for others. So as you continue to walk towards Jerusalem this second full week of Lent, ask yourself if you have accepted Paul’s offer to follow his example, or accepted another saint as your example / mentor. Ask yourself if you are worthy and willing to be the example for someone else. Ask yourself how you are staying fit, so you can be that example. Stott said that we must read the Scriptures, pray, and then seek God’s direction in our lives, if we to be called and really be a “Christian.”

Your character will be defined by your actions, and your actions will define what you believe.

Philip Nolan was the main character in the classic tale *The Man Without a Country*. He had cursed the name of his country and was sentenced to live aboard a ship for the remainder of his life, never seeing or hearing the name of his country again. For fifty-six years Nolan was on an endless journey from ship to ship from sea to sea. When he died, his body was thrown into the sea.

For me, that defines a *destiny of destruction*- total separation. Our willingness to seek and follow mentors; our willingness to be mentors and examples, for others, will build our character as disciples of Christ as continue along our journey of faith.

⁶Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979