

## **“What Is Your Final Destination?”**

*Life is a Highway, Read the Map – part #5*

*Philippians 3:12-4:1*

Today is the fifth part in our series, “Life is a Highway: Read the Map.” The Bible is God’s gift to us, a map to guide us through life. It is the primary revelation of God’s Word to the world, telling the story of Jesus Christ. And so the purpose of these messages is to encourage us to read and apply the Bible’s direction as we journey down the roads of life together.

One place I don’t need a map to get to is Mackinaw Island. I know the way there by heart, because in 2007, our family went there for Katja’s swearing-in ceremony as an American citizen. It was interesting to see how that process worked. The interviews, the questions, the test that you had to pass with all the names of all the people in your local, state, and federal government. Sadly, most of us probably wouldn’t pass it today! But the point of US citizenship is that it is not easy to obtain; that is part of what makes it valuable and desirable, and it is worth the effort to obtain it.

We had a clear goal in mind: Katja’s US citizenship and passport. Therefore, we were eager to go through these steps properly. Part of citizenship is knowing what the laws of the country are and committing yourself to respect and obey them. Imagine if, the day after Katja got her US citizenship, she went to the courthouse and announced to the judge sitting at the bench, “Thank you for my citizenship. Now, I’m going to do whatever I want. It’s a free country. I’m not going to obey any of the laws. I’m just going to do whatever I please.” Would that be a good example of citizenship? Of course not. It would effectively be a

declaration that citizenship was not valuable to her at all. Thankfully, that is not what my wife did.

However, did you know that we all have heavenly citizenship? Listen to what Paul says in Philippians 3: “Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Phil 3:20) Paul is mixing a sport’s metaphor with a legal metaphor. To Paul, citizenship in heaven is extremely valuable. He knows that he has not yet fully attained it, so he runs for the prize. He forgets what is behind and strains ahead for the goal. The image is like a runner leaning for the tape at the finish line, striving with everything they are to reach their final destination.

But what is Paul’s ultimate goal? Unfortunately, pop culture has put in our minds this boring image of heaven that we find in the Hallmark Channel movies. Does Paul want to simply sit in the clouds someday playing a harp? How could that possibly motivate him? Clearly, that is not the goal Paul is striving for. So, what is it?

Paul’s ultimate goal is to glorify Christ. That means in everything he says and everything he does, Paul tries to show people heaven on earth. He is pointing out that we live as foreigners on this earth. Our citizenship really is in heaven.

So, what is heaven? Think about the Lord’s Prayer. “May your kingdom come, may your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Simply put, heaven is the place where God’s will is always done completely. In the Garden of Eden, at the beginning of creation, humans had heaven on earth, but it was lost when Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s will. The book of Revelation teaches us that someday there will be a new heaven and a new earth, places where God’s will is done completely and fully.

This is the place where our citizenship lies. The place where God’s will is done completely. And one of the things that makes heavenly citizenship more valuable than anything else in this world is the price that was paid for it. While U.S. citizenship costs hundreds of dollars by the time you process all the applications, our heavenly citizenship is free, because someone else paid for it. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, paid for our citizenship, our forgiveness, by his shed blood on the cross. 1 Peter 1:17-19 echoes Paul’s point. “...Live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

It is hard for us who are born American citizens to understand this, but if you were seeking citizenship, and you couldn’t afford it, you would be desperate to have someone else pay for you. And when they did, you would be eternally grateful. That is the grace God has extended to us, foreigners, rebels, breakers of the law. God has paid for our grace, so that we can have the fullness of heaven here and now. We can obey, not to earn our freedom, but because of it.

Paul is using a citizenship metaphor because Philippi was a Roman colony. Even though the people of the city didn’t live in Rome, many of them had Roman citizenship, which was extremely valuable. In fact, in Jerusalem, Paul had a conversation with a Roman soldier. (Acts 22) Paul’s citizenship prevented him from being flogged without a trial. That sounds like a great benefit to me! The soldier was surprised Paul could afford his citizenship, since the soldier paid a great deal of money for his own. Yet Paul was born a Roman citizen. The people

in Philippi knew the value of Roman citizenship, and it must have made them wonder how much more valuable citizenship in heaven could be.

We were bought at a price paid by Christ, and now this citizenship in heaven is available to us all. My question is, what do we do with it? Exactly how do we live as citizens of heaven, since clearly, we don't live in heaven yet?

My answer is, we practice our heavenly citizenship here and now. Jesus gave us the rules of God's kingdom. He declared the two most important laws of God's kingdom were, #1 – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength,” and #2 – “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mark 12:30-31) These are the two foundational ways to live as citizens of heaven on earth. You love God, and you love people, all people.

The thing is, we have gotten our citizenship confused. We tend to think ourselves as earthly citizens, and we believe our heavenly citizenship only matters after we die. We tend to live as heavenly citizens only on Sundays, only inside the church walls for an hour or two. Sometimes, not even that. We forget that Sunday worship is really just a practice field or a classroom. It is outside in the world where our actions matter the most. If we do not use our heavenly citizenship where others can see it, then they have no reason to desire it, too.

So what does it look like to walk outside these doors and truly live the words, “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”? I find it helpful to go back to the United Methodist Hymnal, to our church membership vows, because this is where I believe the rubber hits the road. There are five promises we all make when we join the church. Let us review each one.

Number one: you promise to support Christ's church with your prayers. We have a voice in heaven; we must learn to use it. I've said it before, and I'll say

it again: Nothing can happen in the church without deep, committed prayer. Prayer that surrenders everything to God. Prayer that goes beyond our selfish needs. Prayer that changes the church, our families, and us individually. A citizen of heaven prays constantly and moves the heart of God.

Promise number two: to support Christ’s church with your presence. In two words: show up. There is nothing more frustrating to a pastor than a person who says, “I’m a member of your church,” and you can’t recall anything about them because you’ve never seen them before. Honestly, this should be the easiest promise for us to understand and keep. After all, what is our responsibility as US citizens? To show up and vote. Thankfully, we do not have many elections in our church, but the showing up part is critical. God’s gift to you is the church, the Bride of Christ, where we discover what our citizenship is all about. If we claim to be members and followers of Christ and do not show up, the world rightly can call us hypocrites.

Promise number three: your gifts. I want to point out something that should be obvious. We all pay taxes. However, we do not give them voluntarily to the government. Nobody sends an extra ten percent to the IRS for doing such a good job. And yet, by the grace of God, we get to choose how much we give to Christ’s church. So let me ask you a hard question. Are you are generous giver? A sacrificial giver? Or a welfare giver? In other words, do you expect to enjoy the benefits of God’s church at someone else’s expense? Note, I do not ask what amount you give. I want to know, what is your motivation behind the gift? Do you consider your membership in this local church valuable? I know many of you do, and I see it reflected in your generosity. Again, this is a promise we make to

the whole church and to God. Is our giving reflective of the joy we experience in Christ?

The fourth promise is your service. This goes along with the promise of showing up, but it goes deeper. Paul was not content to simply show up at the cities he visited. He served. He healed. He prayed. He worshipped. He gave himself completely to the people he loved. He followed the example of Christ. People-power is just as necessary as financial power to the church's ministries. If we are to make and nurture disciples of Christ, then we need leaders, mentors, teachers, prophets, and other builders of the kingdom. If you are breathing, God has a plan for you, and it involves this local church. I can give you specific ideas: Sunday School teachers, nursery workers, leaders for the church's administrative teams, VBS volunteers, Youth Group volunteers, helpers with decorations and flowers, servers at the food pantry, walkers in the CROP Walk, scripture readers, video techs, people who visit guests, shut-ins, hospitals and nursing homes, and communion stewards. I could go on. If you are still alive, you have a gift to serve. You simply have to use it.

And finally, as a member, you promise to support the church with your witness. You have a story to tell. If you do all these things (pray, show up, give, and serve), if you do God's will here on earth, if you love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and if you love your neighbor as yourself, guess what? You will have every opportunity to tell your story, because people will notice.

Ask yourself honestly, “What kind of citizen of heaven am I?” We all have places to improve. We can all love God more, love our neighbors more, pray more, and give more of both our time and money. What I am asking you today is,

what value do you place on your heavenly citizenship? What is your final destination, and do you want to arrive there with joy and thanksgiving, or with regrets? The choice is yours. Don't just believe me. Read the map.

Let us pray.

**Memory Verse: Philippians 3:20**

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ...”

**Reflection Questions:**

1. How valuable is your U.S. citizenship to you? How do you use it?
2. What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven? How does this concept drive your words and actions?
3. Have you considered the price Jesus paid for your citizenship? What does that say about your worth to God?
4. Are you a member of this local church? Why or why not? Do you do all the five promises? Why or why not?
5. Pray for those in your life who do not know Christ or the offer of heavenly citizenship.