

7. A Heavenly Citizenship (1Q 2026 Christ in Philippians and Colossians)

Biblical material: Phil. 3:17–4:23, 1 Cor. 15:42–44, John 14:27, Ps. 119:165, Job 1:21, 1 Tim. 6:7.

Quotes

- To be a Christian is to be a citizen of heaven, and to be a citizen of heaven is to be a stranger and exile while on earth. *Alistair Begg*
- Christians have a dual citizenship - on earth and in heaven - and our citizenship in heaven ought to make us better people here on earth. *Warren W. Wiersbe*
- *Our citizenship is in heaven.* Not some time in the future. Not after we die. Paul doesn't say, "Our citizenship *will be* in heaven." No. Our citizenship *is* in heaven. *Adam Thomas*
- If you are a Christian, you are not a citizen of this world trying to get to heaven; you are a citizen of heaven making your way through this world. *Vance Havner*
- Your goal defines your relationships. *Mike Murdock*
- There is something far more important than your present situation - your dream and your goal. *T. B. Joshua*

Questions

Why does it matter where we see our homeland/citizenship? What was Paul trying to say when he said this to the Philippians? How do we maintain our perspective when there are so many distractions in life? How do we explain our focus when people ask about our beliefs? Is our homeland just the final objective, or a vital part of the answer in the great controversy?

Bible summary

Paul wraps up his letter to the Philippians with final reminders about where our focus should be (see Philippians 3:17–4:23). We look forward to the resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:42–44). Jesus promises to give us his peace, (see John 14:27). "Those who love your teachings have wonderful peace and nothing trips them up." Psalm 119:165. Job observes we come into this world with nothing and leave the same way (see Job 1:21), similarly 1 Timothy 6:7.

Comment

Paul ends his letter to the Philippians with a sense of joy. The key verse is 4:4 "Always be happy in the Lord—I repeat, Be happy!" Why? Because "But our homeland is heaven, and we're waiting for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from there too." 3:20.

The word for "homeland" is *politeuma*, also meaning "community" or "commonwealth," sometimes translated "citizenship" but it is really referring to the wider body of a group of people.

This is where our focus should be. Not that we ignore or despise our current situation, but this is not the ultimate objective. We belong to a community beyond all this, a true homeland.

This is where our focus must be. It's all too easy to lapse into so much "busy-ness" in our lives that our focus is on "occupying" than on the coming. We can think of ourselves as self-sufficient. Our destiny is what reminds us of why we are to be busy. It gives meaning to who we are and what we do. Even in our church work we can be so involved that hope's goal is forgotten. Instead of putting this hope to the back of our minds and staying busy with other things, we need to make hope relevant every day.

Our prophetic view places us in the time of the church of Laodicea. This is nothing to be proud of, for the church is portrayed as saying it is rich and doesn't need a thing! Sadly this characterization of the church today reveals an attitude of self-sufficiency, a confidence in what it has achieved. The church of Laodicea thinks it has arrived! But God's analysis is that it is pitiful, not recognizing its spiritual poverty, blindness and nakedness.

Such a perspective should bring us back to reconsider what it is that we should be doing, what the vital values are, and what is our true motivation. Here our hope can help us, re-ordering our priorities, and returning our vision away from all the busy things of this life back to eternal truths.

While Jesus in his parable did speak about occupying, it was occupying till he comes. Sometimes it seems we are just occupying, losing sight of our objective. In all we do, in all the church does, we must not be satisfied with working towards permanence here. Our future is with God, our home is with Him, and our values must be His. Instead of working to establish a place in this world, let's remember we look for a city whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10), and that our homeland is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

The powerful image of the Exodus has meaning for us today. It symbolizes coming out of slavery to this sinful world, and traveling to the Promised Land. It reminds us that we are "foreigners and strangers in this world." (2 Peter 2:11). The experience of Israel in the wilderness with all their complaining and dissent is a lesson to us of what should be avoided—a hard-hearted and rebellious attitude (see Hebrews 3:8). We should follow the counsel of Caleb who with Joshua spied out the Promised Land, and gave the positive report, "Let's go and take over the land" (Numbers 13:30). God went with his people on the way out of Egypt right up to their entry into the Promised Land, in the pillar of cloud and fire (Exodus 13:21), symbolizing the way he goes with us. Jesus' prayer for those on the journey is, "I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but for you to protect them from the evil one." John 17:15.

Not only do we have our homeland in heaven, we also are waiting for Jesus to come from there. "Always be ready to explain to anyone who asks you the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Peter 3:15). The hope is a fundamental part of the Christian gospel, and we need to say much more about it. Not fanatically, but calmly and sensibly, for it is the natural conclusion to God's salvation plan and the resolution of the great controversy.

Ellen White Comments

Of the zealous, self-sacrificing disciples of Christ, it is written that Jesus was not ashamed to call them brethren, so fully did they manifest His Spirit, and bear His likeness. By their works they constantly testified that this world was not their home; their citizenship was above; they were seeking a better country, even a heavenly. Their conversation and affections were on heavenly things. They were in the world, but not of the world; in spirit and practice they were separate from its maxims and customs. Their daily example testified that they were living for the glory of God. Their great interest, like that of their Master, was for the salvation of souls. For this they toiled and sacrificed, counting not their lives dear unto themselves. By their life and character they made a bright track heavenward. Upon such disciples, Jesus can look with satisfaction as His representatives. His character will not be misrepresented through them.... {LHU 325}

He who has become a partaker of the divine nature knows that his citizenship is above. He catches the inspiration from the Spirit of Christ. His soul is hid with Christ in God. Such a man Satan can no longer employ as his instrumentality to insinuate himself into the very sanctuary of God, to defile the temple of God. He gains victories at every step. He is filled with ennobling thoughts. He regards every human being as precious, because Christ has died for every soul. {ML 277}

We should remember that we are all brethren, seeking the same home in heaven; but if Christ is not formed within, if you have not the mind of Christ, and do not practice the words of Christ; if you are fully satisfied with your own peculiar ways, so that you feel justified in complaining of your brethren, you will never reach heaven. If you cannot live in harmony on the earth, how could you live throughout eternity in love and peace? There must be kindness, love, courtesy, and delicate regard shown for one another here and now. To practice the principles of love will not prevent us from dealing plainly with our brethren, in brotherly kindness pointing out wrongs and short-comings when it is necessary to do so." {RH July 22, 1890}