

## Citizenship in Heaven

***Philippians 3:20*** *For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Our gathering today resonates with a transformative truth—the reality of our “Citizenship in Heaven”. This profound subject embodies the essence of our identity as believers, urging us to recognize the differences and similarities between our heavenly citizenship and earthly nations. It beckons us to reflect on the indelible aspects of life that bind us as people—a unifying language, a distinct culture, and shared customs that give rise to our sense of belonging. Most importantly, it challenges us to embrace both the responsibilities and the privileges that come with being part of God's eternal kingdom, pointing us toward a hope that transcends this earthly existence.

The formation of earthly nations is often an intricate tapestry woven from the threads of shared language, culture, and historical experience. Nations arise as diverse peoples come together, unified by common goals and aspirations. For instance, throughout the history of the United States, we observe a remarkable journey of unity forged through struggle and sacrifice. The colonists, seeking liberation from the grips of oppression, came together under the banner of freedom and the pursuing of happiness. Their struggle against tyranny culminated in the Declaration of Independence—expressing the principles that would guide their new identity. This document, along with the Constitution, embodies their vision of a nation where individual rights and freedoms are paramount. Thus, it can be said that national identity is not merely about geography but also a shared belief in ideals and purpose, which inspires a collective journey towards fulfilling a greater destiny.

In parallel, we must acknowledge that the Christian nation, founded upon the teachings of Jesus Christ, operates under its own unique set of principles. As citizens of heaven, we find ourselves in a kingdom that is spiritually defined rather than politically delineated. In Philippians 3:20, the Apostle Paul boldly states, “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ”. This declaration of citizenship acknowledges that our fundamental identity is rooted not in earthly allegiances but in our loyalty to Christ, our King. We are called to embody the characteristics of this divine nation, reflecting the values and customs that uphold our faith. Therefore, recognizing our

status as citizens of heaven radically transforms our worldview and inspires us to live out a higher calling.

Language plays a pivotal role in shaping identity. Just as nations are often characterized by their distinctive tongues, so too must we recognize that our Heavenly Kingdom has its own unique language. This language is not merely a medium of communication; it embodies a deeper essence—one that reflects the love, grace, and mercy that permeate every facet of our identity. The teachings of Jesus on love, forgiveness, and compassion form the backbone of this divine language. In Matthew 5:44, Jesus challenges us to “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you”. This call to love transcends the norms of human interaction and invites us into an exquisite way of living that is distinct from the world's expectations. The language of heaven has no curse words, no profanities.

***Zephaniah 3:9*** *For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.*

Moreover, the culture and customs of our heavenly citizenship stand in stark contrast to those of earthly nations. Our cultural identity is rooted in the Divine Kingdom, shaped by worship, discipleship, and fellowship. The practice of gathering together as believers, as commanded in Hebrews 10:24-25, reveals the essence of our customs—a commitment to encourage one another to grow in faith and love. Our rituals, such as baptism and the breaking of bread in communion, are rich traditions that connect us to the life and teachings of Christ. These practices are not mere formalities; they carry profound significance, encapsulating the love of Christ and the transformative power of His sacrifice.

Yet, as we navigate our earthly existence, we inevitably encounter the challenge of remaining faithful to our heavenly identity. The draw of conformity—encouraged by cultural norms and societal pressures—often threatens to distract us from our true purpose. This struggle is reminiscent of ancient Israel's challenges, where the people frequently succumbed to the surrounding nations' influences. In 1 Samuel 8:5, the Israelites clamored for a king “like all the nations”, seeking tangible leadership instead of recognizing God's sovereign rule over them. The Lord, in His wisdom, permitted this request but warned them of the consequences that would follow—a poignancy that resonates even in our contemporary context.

As citizens of heaven, we face similar temptations today. The world often presents us with competing ideologies that seek to redefine our values and beliefs. Yet, as believers, we must remember the admonition of Romans 12:2—"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind". Our spiritual transformation equips us to resist the allure of earthly citizenship and signals a commitment to our divine heritage. Engaging with Scripture and cultivating a close relationship with Christ empowers us to discern God's will and navigate our lives in ways that reflect our heavenly citizenship.

Emphasizing the crucial role of Jesus as our leader further illuminates the distinction between earthly nations and the Kingdom of God. Unlike any earthly ruler, Jesus embodies the ideals and aspirations of His kingdom. His approach to leadership challenges human understanding, exemplifying servant leadership marked by humility, compassion, and sacrificial love. Throughout His ministry, Jesus illuminated the path to the Father, preaching not only the message of salvation but also demonstrating how to live in accordance with God's will. This authentic leadership is significant in our quest for a lasting, transformative identity as we seek to reflect His image to the world around us.

Moreover, the journey towards citizenship in this heavenly kingdom is marked by the sacrificial love of Jesus. Ephesians 1:7 declares, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace". By purchasing our citizenship through His death on the cross (Acts 20:28), Christ established a new union with himself, sealed in His blood. His sacrifice provides a clear pathway to this divine citizenship, reminding us that belonging to this nation comes with tremendous grace and responsibility. The Constitution of our Christian nation, represented in the Holy Scriptures, outlines the principles by which we are called to live as citizens of heaven. The Bible serves as our guiding text, revealing God's character, His laws, and the transformative truth that shapes our understanding of how to engage with the world. The Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew chapters 5-7, is a poignant representation of the heart of our constitutional framework—it paints a picture of the Beatitudes and serves as a manifesto of the values upheld in our kingdom. For instance, Jesus' call to the poor in spirit and the merciful echoes with the promise of divine blessing and the hope of eternal consequences, showcasing a reality that is fundamentally oriented towards a divine agenda.

Contrastingly, while earthly nations are often characterized by divisions, tensions, and strife, the Kingdom of God is marked by peace and reconciliation. The pursuit of peace is a hallmark of our identity as we confront a world marred by conflict. We can see the effects of striving for domination outlined throughout history—wars fought for pride, territory, or ideology unleash devastation upon both individuals and societies alike. Yet, as citizens of heaven, we are called to be agents of peace. The renowned Christian and abolitionist Frederick Douglass understood this calling well; through his advocacy for justice and equality, he sought to bridge gaps in a divided nation. Much like the initiatives of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, our efforts today must similarly reflect our commitment to justice, equity, and love, anchored firmly in the teachings of Christ.

Additionally, our anticipation of the New Jerusalem stands as a powerful testament to the hope that accompanies our heavenly citizenship. The vision of the New Jerusalem, described in Revelation 21, offers us a glimpse into the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises—an eternal dwelling place where all pain and suffering will cease. This promise serves as a bright beacon, guiding our journey as we navigate a world fraught with challenges and uncertainties. The imagery of God dwelling with His people encourages us to persist in our faith, especially as we confront life's trials. The Apostle John beautifully encapsulates this hope, portraying a future free from sorrow and filled with God's unending light.

As citizens of heaven, our call goes beyond mere acknowledgment of our identity; it requires active participation in the mission of God. Each of us has been entrusted with a role to play—serving as ambassadors, bringing others into this kingdom of love and grace. It compels us to share the transformative message of the Gospel with those around us. In the spirit of Matthew 28:19-20, we are commissioned to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations”, reflecting our engagement with the world as we fulfill the Great Commission. Greater still, our allegiance to Christ urges us to cultivate a community of believers, fostering a culture of love and support that embodies the essence of our shared citizenship. Our interactions with fellow believers are meant to reflect the sanctity of our call—an encouragement to spur one another toward love and good deeds. Just as earthly nations create networks of cooperation and support to advance national interests, we, too, must build an interconnected community grounded in Christ's love, exemplifying what it means to live as citizens of heaven in our relationships with one another.

Ultimately, the reality of our citizenship in heaven invites us to embrace an identity that is not tethered to earthly affiliations. While we honor our responsibilities as members of our respective nations, our ultimate allegiance lies with Christ and His eternal kingdom. Our identity shapes our purpose and serves as the foundation for how we engage with the world. The challenges we face today, the divisions in society, and the calls for justice compel us to rise to the occasion, even as we navigate our lives with a distinct perspective rooted in the values of God's kingdom.

In conclusion, as we contemplate the truth of our citizenship in heaven, let us remain steadfast in our commitment to live as faithful citizens of the divine kingdom. We are called to communicate the love of Christ, embody His teachings, and engage authentically with the world around us. Let us embrace our identity, reflect on our responsibilities, and joyfully anticipate the day when we fully dwell in the New Jerusalem. As we encourage one another and seek the welfare of our communities, may our lives shine as beacons of hope, drawing others into this heavenly nation where they too can find grace, love, and eternal belonging. Amen.