

Philippians XXIV – The Commonwealth of Heaven (*Phil 3:20 – 4:1*)

Introduction – Who we think we are influences how we live. In one short phrase, Paul is going to challenge the Philippians' ultimate loyalties. Allegiance is everything and this could be seen in the Judaizer's errors as well as in the Roman colony of Philippi, seeped in state-sponsored idolatry.

Text - *For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.*

Citizenship in Heaven (v20) – Philippi was a proud Roman colony. Roman citizenship was a prize to hold with particular privileges. They willingly sought to make Philippi a Rome away from Rome with their civic life, their architecture, their dress, and their Latin. The new imperial cult demanded that Caesar be recognized and worshipped as Lord and Savior of the world.

Paul knows they can see all of this when he warns them not to set their minds on earthly things, for their citizenship is in heaven. They are a colony, and they are to be a heavenly-colony away from heaven. The Philippian/Roman may have longed to go to Rome one day, but he was committed to making this colony Roman; to bring Roman rule and culture to northern Greece. Similarly, Paul commands the living-on-earth/church that they stand firm against the unbelieving and wicked culture; but neither are they to simply wait to go home. A colony is established to transform the resident culture.

The Savior and Lord of Our Commonwealth (v20) – Philippi did not have its 'lord' with them, their ultimate defender. Neither do the Philippian Christians. Paul directs them to remember their Savior and Lord, and to remember what He has promised He will do. The titles for Jesus here are again set in direct contrast to Caesar (as in 2:9-10).

Eagerly Waiting – All of creation waits for the promised transformation and victory (Rom 8:18-25). Psalm 110:1-2 tells us that our Lord is in heaven while the transformation goes on here by the rod of His strength. It goes out of Zion and He rules in the midst of His enemies. So, our 'eager waiting' consists of more than sitting here in some defeated manner. We are citizens of heaven, ambassadors of the Lord and Savior of the world, sent to establish a colony until His glorious appearing.

The Final Hope of our Citizenship (v21) – The transforming power of God will manifest itself in our bodies at the resurrection, where we will be conformed to His glorious body. Like leaven, that kingdom power works in the loaf transforming it into something new.

For Us – We are being transformed into the image of our Lord. It began when we were born from on high (John 3:3), and it reaches its consummation in our final resurrection (1 John 3:2-3). Today we remain weakened by sin and disease, we are still subjected to the shame of death and disintegration; we will go to the grave. But the thing that happened to our Savior's body will happen to ours as well (Phil 2:9, 1 Cor 15:42-49).

For the World – "...according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself." This is no idle comment. This is promise. Caesar could come in and subdue any uprisings in Philippi, but only by the sword. Christ can, is, and will come to subdue all things to Himself, for He is Lord of all. But He comes in the preaching of His Word, in the outpouring of His Spirit, in the transforming mercy of regeneration, in the prayers and worship of His people. And then one Day, He will come finally and completely to subdue all things to Himself.

A Command to the Beloved (4:1) – His words reveal his love. They are his beloved. He longs for them. They are his joy and crown (not the diadem of kings, but the laurel wreath given in athletic or military victory, "of nuptial joy and festive gladness"). The commands given do not come from one who lords his authority over them, but as from a husband who serves his wife, a father who serves his daughter, or a 'savior' who lays down his life.

Stand Fast – Paul has cast aside his Jewish allegiances; they are worthless to him before the throne of grace. The allegiances of the Philippians must be cast aside as well and they must stand fast in their faith upon their Lord and Savior. Any other claim upon us must be dismissed to the ultimate claim: our citizenship is in heaven. We must stand fast in grace. We must stand fast in faith. We must stand fast in our duty to live as citizens of heaven, worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27).

Conclusion – Our citizenship is no longer in the dust; it is in heaven. Our differences with the people of this world are profound. And these differences dominate everything we do; for we do everything to the glory of God as a commonwealth of the kingdom of heaven. We have been commissioned by our King to spread this commonwealth to the corners of the earth. And the King, our Savior and Lord, is coming.