

The Citizens Of The Gospel CCH Sermon 19OCT25 Phil 1:27-2:4

- PRAY & V27
- *“His Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State requests and requires in the name of His Majesty all those whom it may concern to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or hindrance and to afford the bearer such assistance and protection as may be necessary”.*
- That’s a bit of a mouthful, but that’s what it says inside my passport, and yours may say similar depending on where you are from.
- I’m a citizen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and just being born in this country means that as well as some downsides like paying taxes, I’m given some privileges, like being able to pass freely in different ports or airports and to have assistance from British embassies in those places. And your citizenship will allow you to do the same.
- Well verse 27 actually has the word “citizen” behind the word “conduct”. It’s related to our word for politics and it’s paraphrased by the New Living Translation as ***“Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ”.***
- I love that imagery.
- Repeat paraphrase!
- If you are a Christian this morning, you are to **live in the light of your heavenly citizenship**.
 - You first belong not to Morocco, or Moldova, to Malaysia, you belong to Jesus and to his heavenly Kingdom, the Kingdom of heaven.
 - You are part of something bigger that unites you to people all over the world and throughout history.
 - You have an identity and a cause that is so much more wonderful than anything this world can offer.
 - You have something to cheer about far more loudly than your national football team.
 - WE ARE CITIZENS OF HEAVEN!
- But today we’re going to see a **big surprise** in terms of what being a citizen of heaven looks like.
- Well in this wonderfully positive letter

- Paul is encouraging the Phil to live out their faith.
 - He's spoken of his situation, now he speaks of their situation.
- Philippi was known as "little Rome" or "miniature Rome" ever since the Romans took it over in 42BC.
 - In fact Augustus Caesar very cleverly populated it with retired Roman soldiers, so you weren't going to last long if you suggested that Philippi should be anything other than a Roman colony.
- I don't think they had passports in those days, but if you lived in Philippi you would have been very aware of those who called themselves Roman citizens. It might have felt quite oppressive if you were on the outside. You would have felt quite proud if you were on the inside. In fact Paul gets out of trouble in Philippi partly because he's a Roman citizen.
 - And yet Paul is saying, (turn over the page to 3:20- we started the service with it) *"Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Saviour from there the Lord Jesus Christ"*.
- So as Paul appeals for them to live as citizens in Jesus' kingdom, what do heavenly people look like?
 - Shiny white?
 - Miraculously helpful?
 - super nice?
 - Actually the theme that comes up again and again in this section and that gives expression to our citizenship is **oneness** or **UNITY**.
- So today we are going to see we are to LIVE AS CITIZENS OF HEAVEN IN UNITY... **In 2 areas**.

1) We are to be UNITED IN JESUS AGAINST OPPOSITION v27-30.

- **V27-28a. Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.**
- Paul is ready to die in prison... "To live is Christ to die is gain" (v21). But he suspects that God wants him to carry on living so that he can sharing the most wonderful news that the world has ever heard with believers and unbelievers. That God loves us and wants us to be in a relationship with him.

- So Paul may come to Philippi again and catch up with them all and encourage them.
 - But even if he doesn't get out of prison, he knows that good news travels, and sooner or later he's going to hear that they are living out their citizenship.

- *"I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit"*
- (that's likely a reference to the Holy Spirit who
 - first enables us to come to Jesus
 - and then helps us to love those so different to ourselves).
- *"Striving together as one for the faith of the gospel".*
 - What he longs to hear is that they are one.
 - That's what being a citizen of Jesus' kingdom looks like.
 - That's what having a heavenly passport looks like.
 - Being united. Striving together intensely.

- ▲ I've put a picture there of a rowing crew.
 - I don't know if others here have tried rowing
 - But I think it is the ultimate team sport.
 - You have to move in time up and down the boat
 - Holding your oar at just the right level
 - Push it too high and your side of the boat will rock over
 - Hold it too low and the other side will tip up
 - But work together with huge effort (and usually pain), and your boat will glide at great speed through the water and you'll unite together to beat your opponents.
 - Cambridge university.

- In this first section Paul says you need to act as one.
 - In particular because of what stands against you externally
 - (in point 2 he'll come to the internal challenge).
 - V28. "without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you".

- We knew that Paul was getting a hard time (he was in prison in Rome)
 - But now we learn that the Philippians were having a hard time.
 - It's not spelled out, but they had people against them.
 - In Acts the Christian faith was hugely unpopular in Philippi.
 - It seriously disturbed the status quo in this Roman city.
 - It must have been pretty scary. In fact the word in v28 frightened can be translated "stampede", like when horses are spooked by a noise and run off terrified.

- But Paul says don't be frightened.
 - He says, I know that when you stand up for your faith in the office people roll their eyes, and you can read their minds "here she goes again". **Stand firm.**
 - And when at the Christmas party you don't go along with all the drunkenness and craziness because you live as a citizen of heaven, you get left out, and you discover you get less invites. **Stand firm.**
 - And when you explain that your church left the Church of England because we believe that same sex blessings are not blessings, and that gay clergy should not be sleeping together, you can feel the heat- real opposition sometimes. Stand firm.
- But Paul says, when you stand firm TOGETHER as a church, backing one another up, standing firm in the message of the Bible, not only does that make it easier, but the **world** gets a lesson and the **church** gets a lesson.
- V28 ***"This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed"***. When unbelievers see believers uniting together as one, working as one like a rowing crew with the same core message despite real opposition, it's a sign to them.
- They are shown that the gospel really matters to you. Christians genuinely don't believe that you can believe whatever you want and still get to heaven. It really matters that you believe the gospel- the Bible message about Jesus, because it's true. And if you reject the only lifeboat, Jesus Christ, you won't be safe.
 - Can I just reiterate that for anyone who's not a born again follower of Jesus Christ this morning. Those on the outside of the Christian family will be destroyed. It's stark, but it's true, and I'd plead with you if you are not a believer, to personally put your trust in Jesus.
- But as well as the **world**, the **church** gets a lesson too. V28 ***"but that you will be saved, and that by God"***. There's actually proof you are on the right track when you stand up against opposition. It's easy to be a Christian on a Sunday. But when you stand up for your faith on a Monday at school and get a hard time for it, that's real evidence you are a Christian.
- Why? Because v29-30 suffering for Christ is part of the deal. ***"It has been granted (gifted) to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear I still have (He's still in prison)."***

- The Bible says “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12), and “We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).
 - So don’t think that suffering for your faith means things have gone wrong.
 - Now we don’t want to be annoying and wind people up unnecessarily. Hooray, I’ve been persecuted, I must be on the right track. Maybe you are just being annoying!
- But if as you seek to live out your faith as a citizen of heaven, you get a hard time for it, you can be encouraged- you might be doing something right.
- So my question is **“Are there any Christians you need to stand with”.**
 - When a Christian puts their head above the parapet, 2 things happen.
 - 1- they get sniped at.
 - 2- others hide!
 - But stand shoulder to shoulder with other Christians who are suffering for Christ.
- We can do this by standing with the persecuted church. Ben came up to me after church the other day to say that he thinks persecution will hot up for Christians both here and abroad. **Standing with the persecuted church.**
- We can do this by **standing with our CofE brothers and sisters** who are facing an intense battle at the moment. See the Alliance website.
- We can do it **when a Christian we know comes under flak.**
 - When someone speaks up at work for Christian values, It takes a lot of guts to stand with them and say actually I agree and not to go quiet or worse laugh them down like everyone else.
 - That’s particularly hard when you would have done it in a slightly different way, or wouldn’t have picked the battle, but stand with them. Stand up and be counted.
 - And then you know that when it’s your turn to stand up and be counted, you won’t be on your own.
 - Be a public Christian. A real Christian is a public Christian.
- Well so far in our study of what it’s like to be a citizen of heaven, we’ve seen that we are to be **united** despite the **external** pressure of opposition.
- In our next half we see the need to be united despite the **internal pressure** of sinful pride that seeks to break up a church congregation.

2) UNITED IN JESUS AGAINST SELFISH PRIDE (2v1-4)

- Do you see the 4 ifs in v1.
 - **Therefore**
 - ***if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ,***
 - ***if any comfort from his love,***
 - ***if any common sharing in the Spirit,***
 - ***if any tenderness and compassion,***
- He's painting a portrait of what happens when you become a Christian.
 - 1) You are united with Christ. As you put your trust in him, you become one with him, like a husband and wife become one and share all things. You are united with Jesus. He is yours, you are his.
 - 2) Because of that, his love pours into your life- you don't deserve it, you didn't earn it, but he loves you on your worst days and your best days. Jesus loves you.
 - 3) You each have the Holy Spirit living in you, helping you say no to sin (and you share that experience and joy with all believers). Isn't that amazing, there aren't 120 HS in this room, but one! United.
 - 4) You experience the gentle, kind touch of God who deals so lovingly with, like the perfect Father with his children, helping you one step at a time through life's difficulties.
- Paul says, "Have you experienced even a tiny pale reflection of any of those? Have you had any of that?"
 - "Then do me a favour", says Paul.
 - "Give me the greatest joy I can have in prison ,
 - Not to be released from death row
 - But to know that you are getting on and loving one another".
- You see if you are united to Christ, you are united to his people.
 - **So be united.**
- ▲ When I married Emma, in a small way I joined her family. So now her sisters are my in laws and I get to enjoy the family banter on whatsapp.
- When you joined Jesus, you joined his family.
 - And Paul's saying, if you are even a tiny bit excited about sharing with Christ to whom you are joined.
 - Then be excited about sharing with Christ's family to whom you are also joined.
- V2. PAUL is saying "BE UNITED"!

- 4 more phrases in v 2.
 - 1) By being like minded
 - 2) having the same love
 - 3) being one in spirit
 - 4) and of one mind. (notice the emphasis on mindset there)
- Paul wants the Philippians to have a deep care for one another. Since they are united to Christ, they are to be united to one another.
- And v3-4 (which we learned with the kids) puts it negatively,
 - V3-4 ***Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.***
 - I just find that so challenging!
 - Let your whole life be SERVING not BEING SERVED.
 - And that can only come from the mindset of Christ who was the ultimate servant, which we'll see more of next time.
 - Putting others ahead of yourself.
 - Stop thinking you are the bee knees.
 - Ever since you were little life revolved around you.
 - It doesn't.
 - It revolves around Jesus. King Jesus before whom every knee will bow.
 - Now start living for him.
- So here's the question.
- ARE THERE ANY CHRISTIANS YOU HAVE FALLEN OUT WITH.
 - Perhaps due to some sort of low level selfishness from one or both of you in the past, you don't see eye to eye
 - Or worse, you've had a proper fight with.
 - It's painful at the time,
 - The temptation is to leave it, rather than stir anything up.
 - Let sleeping dogs lie.
- NO. Go and talk to them.
 - "I'm sorry. I think we need to talk".
 - "I'm not happy with how we've left things".
 - "We're never going to be best buddies, but we are brothers and sisters".
 - You don't choose your family.
 - Go and talk.
 - Perhaps take a friend if it's really painful, and certainly if there's a risk of triggering pain from the past.

- You won't necessarily solve everything from the past
 - But you can put things right.
 - Your sin, their sin separated you from God
 - But Jesus has forgiven it.
 - Now you forgive it.
 - That takes time, and it's a process not just a point.
- I'd recommend John Henson's talk on forgiving others on the website¹.
- It really matters.
 - You think people won't notice it if there are factions or fights in a church. People will notice. They won't come back.
 - Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
 - In John 15, Jesus commanded us to love one another.
 - And in John 17 Jesus prayed for our unity together.
 - It really matters.
- In 1994 there was a horrific genocide in Rwanda. Hutus and Tutsis massacred one another over 3 months leaving up to a million dead.
- ▲ A few years later one man Marcel Uwineza told his story²...
- *"Over the last 20 years, God has led me through a school of forgiveness. One day I met one of the killers of my brothers and sister. Upon seeing me, he came toward me. I thought he was coming to kill me too. But I could not believe what happened. As if in a movie, he knelt before me and asked me to forgive him. After a time of confusion, asking myself what was happening, and by a force which I could not describe, I took him, embraced him and said: "I forgive you; the Lord has been good to me." Ever since that moment, I have felt free.*
- As we take communion together we remember the Lord has been good to me.
 - He has forgiven us – we are United to Jesus
 - Let's be united to one another.

¹https://christchurchhuntingdon.co.uk/Media/Player.aspx?show_popout=true&show_media=299029&show_file=328110

² <https://www.americamagazine.org/from-our-archives/2016/03/23/christian-hope/>