

## JOY WAY

An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul

TO THE PHILIPPIANS

by

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### CHAPTER TWELVE

#### HEAVEN BELOW - Philippians 3:17-21

A ONE-TIME famous China medical missionary, Dr. Duncan Main, was told that the Chinese equivalent of his name was "Dr. Apricot, of Heaven Below". That second part is, according to our passage, applicable to every Christian - he, she, is of Heaven Below, for "**our conversation** [our citizenship] **is in Heaven**" (20). It may be our benediction to have the promise fulfilled to us, "**That your days may be . . . as the days of Heaven upon the earth,**" Deuteronomy 11:21. A bit of Heaven here! Note then, to begin with -

#### THE CITIZEN LIKENESS

In this happy letter, Paul seems to be anxious to teach the readers, not only by plain statements of truth, but by illustrations of the truth, drawn from all quarters of human experience - for instance, from the banking world, and from the sporting arena, and now from political life.

We recall that Philippi was a Roman Colony, a bit of Rome away from Rome, its citizens were citizens of Rome. In those days of Imperial Rome, it was a thing of enormous pride to be a Roman citizen.

After Paul's Sermon on the Stairs, he escaped scourging by his claim to that exalted citizen rank, and whereas the chief captain said, "**With a great sum obtained I this freedom,**" Paul was privileged to be in a position to say, "**But I was free born,**" Acts 22:28.

Cities were sometimes accorded this honour, as well as individuals; and for the cause of Philippi's proud position I refer you to my note under the "*Dwelling-Place of the Christians*" in the first Study of this Epistle. How well, then, this city would understand the allusion of this apostle.

It is interesting to mark, that it was at Philippi that Paul first used his right of Roman citizenship, Acts 16:37.

Here we are, then, in this world, but not of it, John 17:16.

We don't belong here; we are sojourners and pilgrims just journeying through,

"And nightly pitch my moving tent;  
A day's march nearer home."

for, as another hymn says, so accurately picking up the Scripture allusions,

"I am a stranger here,  
Heaven is my home."

Many a Britisher, settled in Australia, still calls England "home". Many a citizen of London is serving somewhere abroad, feeling little "at home" there, is often thinking of the affairs and friends from whom, and from which, he is temporarily separated, and looking forward with keen anticipation to the time when he shall get home to the life and loved ones of his real city and country. So it is written, "**But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly,**" Hebrews 11:16, and "**he looked for a city which hath foundations** [no dream city, figment of imagination; but real, and founded upon glorious fact], **whose builder and maker is God**", Hebrews 11:10.

That city colours all life along the road thitherward. So the Christian is given here the likeness of an absentee citizen. Wherefore consider -

### THE CITIZEN LIFE

The apostle has already referred to it when, in 1:27, he said, "**Only let your conversation** [your citizen behavior] **be as it becometh the gospel of Christ**". The citizen of the swell part must not live a slum life. Much of our present passage is given up, negatively or positively, to an examination of what we should live like.

*The True Citizens* - are in 3:17. Don't miss the point that they are "**Brethren . . . together**". It was a lovely feature of the first generation of Christians that "**all that believed were together**", Acts 2:44.

There was a grand togetherness - in the faith they held, in the message they proclaimed, in the unity they demonstrated, in the love they practised, in the aim they pursued, in the zeal they showed. Don't we miss that happy sense of togetherness in the church of this generation? Not looking too far, is this a characteristic of your own particular church - or are there cliques and factions among your members? Is there an aloofness, a coldness there?

Is there a warm-hearted, family spirit in the congregation? If not, are you one of the culprits? Your church will never have the richness of blessing that GOD wants you to enjoy unless, and until, you get "**together**".

We are in the Family together: why, then, should there not be an exhibition of the family spirit in a mutual love and unity together. Do you recall how Psalm 133:1 says, "**Behold, how good and**

## **how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"**

Notice how the brief Psalm concludes (3), "**for there the Lord commanded the blessing**". Where there is togetherness, there is blessing. Paul now goes on to tell these Philippian believers that Christian citizens are noteworthy for their capacity for following.

Citizens of Scotland in Dunedin, New Zealand, will doubtless follow much of the custom of the Old Country - perhaps they still take salt to their porridge?

Citizens of London, residing for business purposes in Siam, will follow still some of the characteristic colloquialisms and mannerisms of their cockney source.

Citizens of Rome would follow the order and habits and outlook of Imperial Headquarters wherever they were situated. You would recognise a Roman centurion anywhere, even when he was in mufti. So it is with the people we are specially considering here: the Citizen of Heaven should follow heavenly ways.

Paul bids his Philippians follow

(a) "**Me**" - does that sound egotistic? I should be surprised if he meant it so. Rather would I think it well to place it alongside of such statements as "**Not I, but Christ**", in Galatians 2:20; and "**Not I, but the grace of God**", in I Corinthians 15:10. It is only in that spirit of real humility that this man urges his friends to follow. Moreover, he seems immediately to tone it down by recommending them to take

(b) "**Us**" - for an example. Is this just what we call an editorial plural? Perhaps; or, possibly, he is including with himself such people as Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Luke, as fellow-exemplaries. All of these were well known in the Philippian church; and the apostle may well have pointed to them as good examples of the way that citizens should behave.

Take note, he says, of other professing Christians, and see if they come up to the standards that these leading believers set. "**Mark them which walk**" - that sloucher, and that soldier - and pattern your own carriage accordingly; for surely it is the vigour and uprightness of the military way that you will desire to emulate, as is becoming to those who bear the proud title of the Citizen of Heaven. One's mind goes back to this same Paul on the shipwreck.

A fine upstanding Roman centurion is on board with him, bearing himself with pride, even in the midst of the tempestuous conditions, as the conscious representative of his Emperor.

Yet, there is a prouder man there even than Captain Julius, it is Paulos, "little" Paul: listen to him, and catch the tone of pride in his voice, "**God, whose I am, and whom I serve**," Acts 27:23. Follow "**me**", he now says, follow "**us**", who seek to walk as true and keen representatives of our Heavenly Master.

It is impossible to leave this theme without recalling what he said of other Christians, that they followed

(c) "**The Lord**" - "**ye became followers of us, and of the Lord**", I Thessalonians 1:6. So close were these leaders to their Lord that, to follow them was, almost automatically, to follow Him.

How magnificent a claim could we possibly make it? That if they followed us, they would, ipso facto, be following the Lord?

*The False Citizens* - are in 3:18-19.

(a) Their profession - was evidently that they were Christians; but they were not true, not sincere; indeed, they were "**enemies**" in disguise. Open enemies, scorners, are bad enough; but I feel sure that they do less harm to the cause of CHRIST than those who pretend to be on His side, who for some material, or social, gain masquerade as believers, while all the while despising the whole business.

"**Wolves in sheep's clothing**", our Lord described them. Dogs and pigs pretending to be sheep; but, sooner or later, proved by their backsliding to have been never sheep at all. says II Peter 2:22.

What damage such people do to the Lord's name and honour people of the world take them at their own estimation, and when their conduct contradicts their profession, when they are thus "found out", the worldlings say that all these Christians are hypocrites and their religion is no earthly use. They fail to differentiate between the False Citizens and the True Citizens.

(b) Their end - Their "**end is destruction.**" Alas, they have turned many away from the faith because of their behaviour. Many who might have joined us on the Narrow Way have been discouraged, and have elected to remain with the majority, Matthew 7:13, on their sad way to destruction.

Now these false friends themselves traverse the dark road to their proper end, even as Judas went "**to his own place**", Acts 1:25. What a false citizen that man was!

(c) Their god - Their "**god is their belly.**" While most eat to live, these live to eat. To satisfy their physical appetite, and, indeed, their sensual, lustful appetite, is all they care for, After all, your "**god**" is the thing, or person, that comes first in your thoughts, that you most want to please; and the belted portion of their anatomy occupies the place of a deity with quite a number of folk. These here are among these worshippers.

F. B. Meyer told the story of a man of wealth who was taking his friend round his magnificent mansion, in which a spacious chamber was dedicated to be a chapel. The visitor, who thought of little else than good living, on entering the chapel, said, "What a magnificent kitchen this would make." Whereupon his host replied, "You are mistaken, this is not a kitchen; when I have made my belly my god, then I will make my chapel my kitchen, but not before."

Applying the story to "many" whose one thought is food and drink, Dr. Meyer's comment was, "There is no chapel in their life, it is all kitchen."

(d) Their shame - "**whose glory is in their shame.**" That is, they glory in things of which they

ought to be ashamed. As Plummer puts it, "their boasted liberty was shameful slavery to lust."

There are in every age, perhaps in every country, those who wickedly make game of shame. Such people swarmed in parts of Rome, from which Paul was writing. It is not to be necessarily implied that persons described in these verses 18-19 were to be found in the ranks of this Philippian church, though it might be true in Rome, Romans 1:21-32. The apostle is only concerned to warn his friends because corruption, like dry rot, has an extraordinary quality of spreading; and, as a Latin author put it, "The corruption of the best is the worst." Let all Christians beware: "**let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.**"

(e) Their mind - "**who mind earthly things**". Like John Bunyan's Man with a Muck-rake - quite unconscious of the heavenly messenger holding over his head a golden crown, because his eyes are on the ground, completely occupied with the menial task of sweeping together the refuse about him.

If these of our verse were truly Citizens of Heaven, their minds would have been set on heavenly things. "**If ye then be risen with CHRIST**, [The 'if' does not imply any doubt. The Greek construction simply means '*Since ye then . . .*'] **seek those things which are above . . . set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth**", Colossians 3:1-2.

What a terrible indictment of human beings - indeed, of professing, though not real, Christians. Paul feels that, in the case of these Philippians, who have only recently come out of impure heathendom, the danger of infection was very real. So he has told them about it "**often**", and withal "**weeping**" (18).

The Cross meant so much to Paul; and it moves him to tears that those renegades have so far demeaned themselves as to become "**the enemies of the Cross of CHRIST**" - not merely of it, but of Him.

Thomas Kelly was moved to write -

"We sing the praise of Him who died,  
Of Him who died upon the cross,

The sinner's refuge here below,  
The angel's theme in Heaven above."

It was more than the deeply emotional apostle could stand to think of people speaking ill of that, and of Him, he held so dear. What does the Cross, the crucified Lord, mean to us?

We speak not just now of its eternal meanings, of its mighty victories - but of the sheer love there displayed for such undeserving sinners. Shall we let that love now lead us on to speak of -

### **THE CITIZEN'S LORD**

As all Roman citizens owed obedience, loyalty, and allegiance to their Emperor, so do the Heavenly citizens owe the same to Heaven's Lord. This JESUS was "**born... Saviour**", Luke

2:11 - and we have [have we?] accepted Him as our Saviour. He was also said to have been "**born King**", Matthew 2:2 - have we acclaimed Him as our King? Does He actually rule over everything?

"If you do not crown Him Lord of all,  
You do not really crown Him Lord at all."

That is true, isn't it? Think it out. Put it right. Keep it up.

Let us dwell upon the happy thought of our glorified, and glorious, Lord. And first of

(a) His Coming Return - "**from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ**" (20). Yes, He is not only "**a Saviour**", Luke 2:11; but, as here, "**the Saviour**", the only one, "**there is none other . . . whereby we must be saved**", Acts 4:12; can you go further and say, "**My Saviour**", Luke 1:47? Again I press the matter upon you, lest, if His return be near, His coming should find you unprepared to meet Him.

Do I seem to detect nowadays, in most unexpected quarters, a newly awakened interest, and even belief, in the Second Advent? Thank GOD if it be so. Certainly that would happily correspond with the striking emphasis on the subject that we find in the Bible - for, with the one exception of the Atonement, there is no other theme that is so often referred to in Scripture. It ill becomes any citizen, therefore, to omit it from his consideration.

What a thrill it would be if, for instance, it were announced to these Philippian Roman citizens that the Caesar was planning to pay them a visit. Imagine how the streets would be cleaned, the houses decorated, the people prepared. That is what, in joyous reality, is going to happen to those who dwell in Heaven Below - our Saviour, King and Lord is actually coming again.

Such is "**that blessed** [happy] **hope**" of which Paul writes to Titus (2:13). It is an interesting grammatical point that, in our twentieth verse, while "**Heaven**" is in the plural, "the Heavens", "**whence**", for "which", is in the singular - denoting, perhaps, a specific point in the Heavens: might it be the city gate? Ye earth-wide citizens, keep your eyes often on that gate, through which He entered in ascension glory, Hebrews 9:24, and from which He will one day emerge in advent glory.

Says one commentator, "Oh! When will those pearly gates open? When will that cavalcade issue forth? When through the dim haze will the Lord come, riding upon His white horse, and followed by the army of Heaven?"

What a hope; what a day; what a scene, what a triumph; what a joy! Oh that, being unafraid, and unashamed, we may be happily ready to join in the welcome to the Returning King.

There is next to be considered

(b) His Transforming Grace - "**who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body**" (21). What amazing changes His advent will bring about.

- *Changes in world government* - "**Behold, a King** [the coming King] **shall reign in righteousness**", Isaiah 32:1;

- *Changes in geographical contour* - "**His feet shall stand in that Day** [the coming Day] **upon the Mount of Olives... and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst . . . and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south . . . And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem . . . And the Lord shall be King over all the earth**" Zechariah 14:4, 8-9;

- *Changes in animal characteristic* - "**the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together . . . and the cow and the bear shall feed . . . and the lion shall eat straw like the ox . . . they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain**", Isaiah 11:6-7, 9;

- *Changes in personal character* - "**we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is**", I John 3:2, one of the most amazing changes of all;

- *Changes in human bodies* - are the particular alterations here under review. "**Our vile body**" - the adjective does not really bear the significance that we attach to it to-day: "the body of our humiliation" is much the idea - says Lightfoot, "the body which we bear in our present low estate, which is exposed to all the passions, sufferings, and indignities of this life." This body of ours, then, beset with limitations, nerves, injuries, is, at His Coming to be completely transformed to be like "**His glorious body**."

Remember the body of His Transfiguration splendour, the body of His Resurrection wonder, the body of His Ascension beauty - what glory! And my body is to be something, somehow, like that. Amazing!

A more detailed examination of the marvel is given in I Corinthians 15.

So we come to

(c) His Almighty Power - "**according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself**" (21).

- "**Able to save**", says Hebrews 7:25.

- "**Able to succour**", says Hebrews 2:18.

- "**Able... to subdue**", says the verse here.

Indeed, there is no limit to what He is able to do for us. Things that can't be can be, if He is there. Look at the Bible Home of Incurables, Mark 5.

*The men's ward contains that poor hopeless, helpless man, Legion* - "**no man could bind him . . . neither could any man tame him.**" Until the Good Physician enters the ward: then the impossible cure is wrought!

*The women's ward has a poor, distressed soul* - "**suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.**" Twelve

years already she had suffered. Must she go on like that: can nothing be done for her? Nothing! Until He enters, to work the miracle.

*The children's ward shows us a pathetic case: the little person might have been healed but for the delay in the women's ward. Alas, now she's gone, "thy daughter is dead" - beyond all aid. All aid? No, not His - for when He enters the mighty deed is done.*

Tell me, has sin got such a hold of you that yours is a hopeless case? The devil is strong, but JESUS is stronger "Satan to JESUS must bow."

Tell me, are you finding life intolerable - so full of difficulty, distress, disappointment? He is able to subdue that life of yours, so that though you feel like old Jacob, If "**all these things are against me,**" Genesis 42:36, you yet shall see that "**all things work together for good to them that love God**", Romans 8:28.

The citizen's Lord is an almighty Lord, able to subdue their lives, their wills, their circumstances, their bodies, their all until the blessed day when all the joy of their citizenship shall be finally released, and fully released, in their Homecoming.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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