

Identity: Citizen of Heaven

Hey, before I start, I wanted to highlight a few things going on at the church. First of all, ladies, if you interested in learning more from God's Word and connecting with some other women, we have our Fall series starting up soon and you can sign up online right now! And our MOMs studies are taking sign-ups as well online, so women with school age children, check that out. And I have a privilege in leading is Community Groups, a place where learners and leaders can connect and discuss life and God's word. These groups are co-ed, but you don't have to be married to be a part of it. Singles, couples, young and a little less young are all welcome to join us this fall. Sign-ups start this weekend online! And speaking of this weekend, we have a Sunday Morning service again, from 8-9. There's no Calvary Kids, but all are welcome.

Let's pray

We are continuing our look at our Identity in Christ this week. As some of you know, I am a high school social studies teacher. Please pray for me and all my fellow teachers, we are going through the most unique start to a school year in our careers, possibly in American history. Our identity as educators is being challenged: can I still be me on a screen like I am in the classroom? As Kelly shared last week, when you go through a change and your identity is challenged, you start to feel and do things that reveal stuff in your heart you didn't know were there.

But in some ways, I'm used to talking about Identity. As someone who has worked with teens in different ways for over 20 years, I've seen a lot of issues related to identity. Teenagers are quick to change and adopt new fashion, new music, new hobbies, new relationships as they try to figure out who they are, independent of their parents. It's why you see kids try a new style of pants that don't seem to flatter them, it's why you see them date one person, and then their next boyfriend or girlfriend seem the complete opposite. And if you're a young person here still experimenting, hang in there, it takes time but if you're patient and get good advice, you'll figure out who you are. And parents of teens and young adults, hang in there, it takes time but if you're patient and get good advice, you'll figure out who they are, and a little more of who you are as well. I've seen the Youth Institute at Fuller Theological Seminary share that young people today try on careers and relationships and even faith like some people try on clothes: they put them on, look at it, even buy it and take it home, but keep the receipt and tag and take their time to decide if they are going to keep it. Commitment phobia, it's what many of us struggle with. Even with our identity. We don't want to be labeled, put into a box, because we learned early on that means we miss out on other things, we don't get invited, we don't get chosen. And that FOMO, that fear of rejection, controls us in so many ways. So we are naturally careful to craft our identity. Because let's be honest, our

identity we have is something we chose. Like Kelly shared last week, we often make a mistake in our choice, but it is something we choose. And if you believe that there is a God and He created you, even then He gives you freedom to choose to accept the identity He has for you or the one you craft for yourself. But either way, your identity, the way you see and present yourself, has profound impact on your career and your relationships.

And tonight I'm going to talk about how where you're from impacts your identity. As Americans, we undervalue the impact of a homeland, we're a nation of immigrants, unless you're Native American, your ancestors came from somewhere else. And we're so mobile now, we move all the time, especially lately. I don't know about you, but I'm losing friends to other states a lot! Especially Idaho! So we don't get the power of a homeland.

But in ancient times, the land was everything. People didn't move hardly ever, they didn't travel far. Their family traditions were tied to the landscape, their way of life came from the way they made a living from the land, most religions had gods attached to their territory. Being a citizen of a country carried the idea that you followed that state's customs, you agreed with its values, you were a part of its people, you were rooted and established within its walls. And every citizen, both then and now, have rights and privileges, along with responsibilities and duties. And good citizens know them. So those are my points tonight as I share from Philippians 3: 17-21. For if you want to adopt the identity of being a Citizen of Heaven, you should know your rights and privileges, your responsibilities and duties, and how you become one.

Philippians 3:17-21

*Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. **18** For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. **19** Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. **20** But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21** who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

The context is that Paul is nearing the end of his letter, encouraging the people of Philippi to live differently. And he uses this idea of being from a different kingdom, a different country than the one they found themselves in. And they would have understood what he meant. Philippi was a Roman colony in Greek territory. To increase loyalty and military presence, Rome had sent many military families along with other Roman citizens, to live in Greece. So while Greece was their region, their language, their dress, their customs was Roman. And their rights and responsibilities were from Rome and for Rome, not for the local people. So the Philippians got this idea: their lifestyle was

to reflect their allegiance. And so Paul gives them a new citizenship: your true homeland is the kingdom of God, not this world. And for any of us who have pledged allegiance to Jesus, we are the same. This could be a whole series on what it means to be a part of the Kingdom of God, but we'll keep it short tonight. So what are our rights and responsibilities? If you wanted to look at an extensive passage on the kingdom of heaven, look at the parables in Matthew 14.

Rights and Privileges

- **Community:** In many parables of the kingdom, Jesus shows it is large, it has many members, whether he is using lots of wheat or fish or sheep, there's a bunch of them. We have people to be with, we have community, we're not alone.
- **Home:** In John, Jesus once told his disciples that he was going to go to prepare a place for them in heaven. We all have a special place, where we feel right at home.
- **Treasure:** In Matthew 6:19-20 Jesus challenges his followers to serve others as a way of making an investment so that they might store up treasures in heaven. Treasure or wealth represents we will be taken care of, we will not want for anything, our needs and desires will be met.
- **Protection:** Throughout Psalms, God is portrayed as a strong tower, mighty fortress, our defender. Just as the Philippians knew the Roman guard was there to protect them, we know we have God to defend and protect us. So we can live without fear and have confidence.
- **Appeal to the King:** Paul and Peter write often of how we can approach Jesus our King, that we can enter the throne room and be heard. That access to God through prayer and worship is so underappreciated, it's our right and privilege to approach Jesus confidently.
- **True Justice:** Because our King is Just and All Knowing, we can trust his decisions, his counsel, his verdict. In a couple of parables about the kingdom, it paints a picture of a final judgement, where things will be made right. Being a citizen of heaven means we trust God's judgement and not take matters into our own hands.

This Kingdom of Heaven is so great, so wonderful, we can hardly believe it. But if we do believe it, then we will exercise our rights and enjoy our privileges.

Story of college students

You see, if we don't pay attention to our responsibilities, we miss out on privileges later. If those students had the identity of being good students, it would have shown in their actions. The same is true for us. The more we see ourselves as citizens of heaven, then our actions will reflect it.

Responsibilities and Duties

- Seek Unity- The other place Paul uses this idea of citizenship is in Ephesians 2:19, where he points out the Jews and the Gentiles are being made into “fellow citizens” In the greek, it has the connotation of being made into a new nation. Not one adopting the others customs, but both being melted together into a new people of a different kingdom. So we have the duty to seek unity with our brother and sisters in Christ: no matter their race or ethnicity, their political party or occupation, gender or economic level.
- Give Generously- Jesus over and over emphasized giving, honoring people who gave all they had, challenging those who held onto their stuff too much. We can't have two masters, so giving helps us show who our real Master is.
- Serve Others- similar to giving, Jesus over and over again shows us that we need to put others first and to help them.
- Recruit Others- we seek to bring others to his kingdom.
- Live by Faith- Living by faith is the key marker of a citizen of heaven. Abraham obeyed God's call, Moses eventually listened to God's orders, Elijah submitted to God's plans. Obedience is the mark of a true citizen of heaven.

So why knowing our citizenship is in heaven is important? Because we can't be truly who we are unless we have a place where we truly belong.

You know, one of my favorite books of all time is the Hobbit. The movies were a little disappointing, too many changes, but one theme they made stronger in the movie is the theme of the importance of home, of having a place where you truly belong. The dwarves lost their home, due to greed and selfishness and a great serpent, a dragon now controls their kingdom. They've been lost, wandering, and now feel it's time to take it back. And Bilbo, a hobbit who is perfectly happy where he's at, is recruited to help them. And they make fun of him for his longing for his fireplace, and his garden and the hills and streams of the Shire. And he almost gives up, but he changes his mind as says to them “I often think of Bag End. I miss my books. And my armchair. And my garden. See, that's where I belong. That's home. That's why I came back, 'cause you don't have one. A home. It was taken from you. But I will help you take it back if I can.” The power of being a citizen means we can take risks and go on adventures, knowing we always have a place to return. The king dwarf Thorin at the end of the trilogy finally gets it and says “If people valued home more than gold, the world would be a merrier place.” Being a citizen of heaven is precious, it's awesome, it gives us purpose and privilege. So how do we become one?

Becoming a Citizen

Do you know to become a citizen of the United States, there are many steps. Lots of paperwork, forms, there is even a basic English language requirement, but the part most people fear is the Civics test. There are 100 questions, the examiner chooses 10 of them of their choice, and you need to get at least 6 right. One NBCNews reported that one

study showed that only 39% of natural born Americans could pass this test. Here's a few questions

How long is a term for a Senator?

How many representatives are in congress?

Who was president during World War I?

How many amendments does the Constitution have?

Name two Cabinet level positions.

But you see, becoming a citizen of heaven isn't like that. You can't get in by taking a test, you can't buy your way in, you can't go on a crazy expedition and find it. A better analogy of becoming a citizen is gaining asylum. You see, you and I are like refugees. This is something some of you have heard of if you've been to our church. We are actively seeking to help the refugees of the Rohingya, a people who've lost their homes and have no where to go, no future. Our country up until the last few years took in many refugees around the world, offering asylum. And you know what's crazy about asylum, the way it works, is that the host country takes on the cost of helping the refugee. That nation knows these people have nothing. They will have to bear the cost of housing them, getting them skills, providing healthcare, patiently providing for them and guiding them towards a better life. It's a program of sacrifice, one unfortunately that is desperately needed in our world but many countries are reluctant to provide because of the cost and risk it involves.

But let's imagine you are living in a mud filled camp, owning next to nothing, having no education, no connections. You are about to head into the middle of the camp where you will steal, fight, and cheat to get stuff you want for survival and to dull the pain of all the hurt and loss you've experienced. But as you start to head down that path, someone taps you on the shoulder. You turn and this man tells you that you've been offered asylum, a new home in a new place where there are good things and you will be able to be free of pain and suffering. How do I get there you ask? Follow me, he says. That's it? No papers, no proving myself, just follow you? Yep, just turn from where you were going and follow me. We didn't earn our Citizenship, we were Rescued.

Exodus 3:7-8

"I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, **8** and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land

You see God created the nation of Israel from a people who were nothing, to show His great power and mercy, to show He is a rescuer, a Savior. This foreshadowed what God

would do for the whole world, he would send his one and only son to save all who will follow him. He takes on that cost of giving us a new home, He pays for it all, not because we have any skills or money or connections, but because he loves us and desires to save us. And He will lead us Home.

But like that refugee, even though our current place is a mud-pit, its people are abusive and mean, its government unjust; we struggle to leave it because it's what we know and where our messed up habits fit in. But our rescuer Jesus, is patient and kind and answers all our questions. "Jesus, I'm dirty and diseased, I'm going to infect and mess up this place" "It's ok, I'm a healer, I will make you well and clean you up so you can enjoy this new home." "Jesus, I don't know where to stay, I don't want to be a bum on the street." "It's ok, I'm a carpenter, I will build you a place that will be comfortable and just right for you." "Jesus, I don't know the language or the customs, I won't be any good." "It's ok, I'm a teacher, a rabbi. I can teach you and show skills so you have purpose." "Jesus, I won't know anyone, I'll be all alone. "It's ok, I'm with you, I'll be your neighbor, and I'll introduce you to everyone, you'll fit right in."

So don't worry, our rescuer helps us become true citizens.

And I guess there is a 3.5

Remember, we're not home yet. This world is not our home, you're supposed to feel uncomfortable, like a stranger, like a foreigner. In fact, the more you follow Jesus, the more you feel out of place. The theme of being in the wilderness is strong throughout the bible. Abraham experienced it, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, even David all spent long periods of time in the wilderness. If you start feeling at comfortable and like you've arrived, something's wrong. But at the same time, if you've lost joy and hope and only feel despair, you've lost sight of your true home. Heaven is our home, that's where we truly belong as citizens. And the Magic Kingdom of Disneyland has nothing on it. It's where we will have amazing adventures, unbelievable comfort, everlasting peace, where there is no more pain, no more sadness, no more death. Where love is truly authentic and reciprocal. And just like Bilbo, that vision of home carries through those dark times. And once you're a citizen, nothing will keep you from getting home.