

## **PILGRIM'S TRUE CITIZENSHIP** **(Phil. 3:15-21      October 14, 2001)**

Ahmed Khan was born in the northern provinces of Afghanistan. He led a brutal life. When he was twenty-seven he made the decision to sell everything he owned. His parents, older brothers and cousins sold much of what they owned.

Together they scraped together \$8,200 US. A long time friend – Mohammed Ahktar had introduced him to a friend of a friend, who knew how to contact a people smuggling ring.

Finally, the day came. Ahmed parted with the money – his life's savings and those of most of his family. He handed it over to unscrupulous men. He knew he might well be driven to the countryside and murdered without being taken to the land he wanted to escape to.

But, he had found genuine people smugglers. He was taken in a cramped lorry across the border into Pakistan. There he spent three weeks in a squalid refugee camp before being taken to the airport, given false documents and motioned onto a plane headed for Indonesia.

He was met in Indonesia and taken to a coastal port where he shared one room with seventeen other men while they waited.

Finally, he and four hundred and fifty-nine others were loaded onto a fishing vessel that looked like a good downpour would sink it.

They set out for Christmas Island, but on the way the ship began to take water. They sent out a mayday and the Norwegian vessel *Tampa* arrived to take them on board. The *Tampa* decided to head to an Indonesian port – Ahmed and the others could not allow that – they had come too far. They threatened the crew and the *Tampa* headed for Christmas Island.

The standoff began. Finally, they were transferred to an Australian navy ship – the HMAS *Manoora* and found themselves anchored off Nauru.

This was not in the plan. Ahmed refused to leave. Despite the sun and conditions – it was Australia or nothing. He had risked too much. It had cost too much. They tore up the beds, the attacked the guards – it was Australia or nothing. It took force to get him onto Nauru.

My point in all of this is not to make a comment one way or the other on the immigration debate – that is another sermon. My point is this. Why would a man sell everything he had, give it to men who may not meet their end of the deal, risk his life time and again, threaten the men who rescued him, refuse to leave a navy vessel – all in the name of getting to Australia?

Because any cost is worth it to swap Afghani citizenship for Australian citizenship.

Ahmed wanted to flee a harsh land with oppressive rulers who killed at the drop of a hat to head for a stable, wealthy land with good rulers. And this hope was enough to risk everything.

Today, I want to show you that the worldwide refugee crisis is merely a parable, a vivid demonstration of life in this world for every one of us.

Whether we stop to realise it or not, we live in land controlled by a vicious thug – the prince of the power of the air. It is a brutal land – filled with sin, death and hate. But we have heard about another land – a land where the ruler is just and loving, a land where there is no sin, no death, no hate – only joy, peace and love – forever.

And it will cost us everything to get there – but any cost, any price is worth it. The journey is a tough one. But when we consider what it means to leave the citizenship of earth and acquire the citizenship of heaven – every step of the way is wonderful – for we walk with the King and we draw nearer to His land.

John Bunyan understood this better than anyone. His parable of Christian fleeing the City of Destruction heading for the Celestial City describes perfectly the life, the walk and the reward that await a child of God. We know this book as *Pilgrim's Progress* but its full title is *The Pilgrim's Progress From This World To That Which Is To Come*.

Brothers and sisters, we are journeying to another world. We have swapped citizenship in this world for citizenship in heaven.

The Apostle Paul understood this. He knew that he lived and walked in the Roman world – but he did not belong there. His citizenship was in heaven. And he was going to claim it and nothing would stop him.

We have been looking at this for a number of weeks. We are now in Philippians 3:15.

Paul has just described his life. Forsaking the things of this world in order to gain Christ. In verse 14 he said that this was an ongoing struggle throughout life:

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

But a life of pressing on toward the goal is not just for Paul – this is not merely the lot of the supersaint – it is for all of us. So in verse 15 he writes this:

Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude.

This is misleading. You might read this and say – OK the struggle is for the perfect Christians. I am an ordinary grunt of a Christian – this isn't for me.

But, two and only two of the major translations use the word 'perfect' in this verse. They are the NASB and the KJV. And both are clearly wrong.

The word in verse 15 is  – and it can mean perfect OR mature. But Paul uses this word many times, and he consistently uses it to mean mature.

Paul is saying this – Pressing on toward the goal which is Christ Himself – this should be the attitude of every mature believer – and by implication – we should all desire to be mature and pressing on to Christ.

And if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you.

If you think that the Christian life is anything other than a gruelling journey onwards to the goal – then God will show you the truth.

Paul's point is this. From the moment of salvation – we are on the road to glory. It is a road of joy, wonder and pleasure. But the joy, wonder and pleasure come from pressing on toward Christ – knowing Him better – learning of Him.

But some Christians think that when we are saved, the heavenly limousine arrives, we get in – and are chauffeured to glory.

Far from it. They forget the struggle, the hills and valleys, the grind of the journey. We have to have the attitude of pressing on day by day, step by step. And if we don't persevere, God will teach us the error of our ways – sin, despair, troubles – all will teach us the truth.

Listen to how Spurgeon described the journey:

All the way to heaven, we shall only get there by the skin of our teeth. We shall not go to heaven sailing along with sails swelling to the breeze, like sea birds with their fair white wings, but we shall proceed full often with sails rent to ribbons, with masts creaking, and the ship's pumps at work both by day and night. We shall reach the city at the shutting of the gate, but not an hour before.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 16:

However, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.

The Philippians had attained a certain standard. They had suffered for Christ. Been imprisoned for Christ. They had counted the cost.

Now was not the time to turn back. Now was the time to press on to the prize. Keep living to the standard. Keep persevering.

One of the tragedies of the Christian life are those who start well and finish poorly.

Dudley told me about an elder in a church where he was a member. A man who had served God well. But in his eighties, he left his wife for another woman.

Church history is littered with such stories. Missionaries who served well – but became embittered and denied Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973) p. 24.

Roy Clements – served with distinction at the historic Eden Baptist Church in Cambridge. A world famous author, speaker and pastor. He left his wife of thirty years for a man.

Yet, it need not be so dramatic. More common is the pilgrim who merely lets his first love grow cold. Instead of leaving the path – they just sit down on the path and hope that heaven comes sooner rather than later.

Paul says – get up, press on, keep to the standard – don't slow down now!

The joy is in the journey. The wonder is in the relationship with Christ. The pleasure is in obedience.

Don't swap the joy of the journey for anything.

Then in verses 17 to 21, Paul sums up this whole section in a tremendous appeal to press on to glory.

Look at verse 17:

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

Paul was not perfect. Far from it. But, Paul was well worth imitating. In verse 13 we see why. He was a man of one goal. This one thing I do – I forget what lies behind and I press forward to what lies ahead.

Paul was a man with a goal. To plod resolutely and steadfastly step by step to heaven.

William Carey had this same trait. "Eustice," Carey said to his nephew, "if after my removal anyone should think it worth his while to write my life, I will give you a criterion by which you may judge of its correctness."

"If he gives me credit for being a plodder, he will describe me justly. Anything beyond this will be too much. I can plod. That is my only genius. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything."<sup>2</sup>

That is the path of the true pilgrim.

Paul was heading to glory and he urged others to follow him. But more than that he urged that we observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

Paul's point is this. Over the past few weeks I have stood up here and told you that although the Christian life can be tough – it is the only true life of pleasure, fulfilment and peace.

But, at 11.00am, the sermon ends and I leave the pulpit. Now we are out the back at morning tea. If you hear me whining about my lot in life, complaining how hard I have

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Warren Wiersbe, *In Praise of Plodders!* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1991) p. 11.

it and envying the pagan's with their women, money and worldly pleasures – you would conclude that I'm just blowing smoke when I preach.

A man's life is the rule of his message.

Similarly, Paul lived with these people. They saw him. He was beaten, imprisoned, persecuted. How did he respond? He sang hymns of praise. He rejoiced. He thanked God. Over to chapter 4 verses 11 to 13:

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

In Paul they saw real joy, the peace that passes understanding, a contentment that the world can never provide. And they saw it not just in Paul. They saw it in others. So Paul urged – walk according to the pattern, the example that others have given to you.

Here is the bottom line. Does Christ satisfy?

Look around you. Which men and women have the true deep-seated joy, the peace, the marriage, the family life, the satisfaction, the certainty about death and a real contentment?

If it is the wealthy businessman who has left wife number three for the twenty-six year-old secretary, and though he hasn't been to church in years still thinks he is saved – then by all means go that route.

But the reality is that true life is not found there. The men and women you want to imitate, those who have the life you want – they are the ones pressing on to Christ, growing day by day in Christ, becoming more like Christ. It is in them you will find the real joy of life.

And the only way to follow them is to press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

In verses 18 to 21, Paul compares and contrasts two groups.

- Those whose minds are on the things of earth. Those we must not follow.
- Those whose minds are on the glories to come. Those we should follow.

This much is obvious. But who is this first group described in verses 18 and 19?:

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

Without doubt, these are men and women who claim to be Christians – but were not. The church in Philippi is mature. It is highly unlikely that they would look at those who professed to be unbelievers and be tempted to follow them. I doubt too many of us have looked at Rupert Murdoch – and said – that’s the life for me.

And the term enemies of the cross suggests that they were inside the church – a sort of “fifth column.”

These are men and women who want the world now and heaven when they die. But all they get is the pitiful pleasures of this life that cannot satisfy and in the next life the pain of hearing – Depart from Me, I never knew you.

But their ranks never thin. There are always those who think they can have the pleasures of this life, suck this world dry and then go on to glory.

Paul says – while many walk that way – I tell you with tears – do not follow them!

Their way does satisfy. Jeremiah 2:12-13:

“Be appalled, O heavens, at this,  
And shudder, be very desolate,” declares the Lord.  
“For My people have committed two evils:  
They have forsaken Me,  
The fountain of living waters,  
To hew for themselves cisterns,  
Broken cisterns  
That can hold no water.

That is what these people have done. They have looked to the world. They have ignored the precious fountain of living waters – Christ Himself – and dug cisterns – broken cisterns – that hold no water.

They have said – I want the things of the world and Christ tacked on. And they have deceived themselves – for the world is a mirage. It is in fact a dry cistern that cannot satisfy.

John Piper puts it this way:

We have settled for a home, a family, a few friends, a job, a television, a microwave oven, an occasional night out, a yearly vacation, and perhaps a new personal computer. We have accustomed ourselves to such meagre, short-lived pleasures that our capacity for joy has shrivelled. ...

The scenery and poetry and music of the majesty of God have dried up like a forgotten peach at the back of the refrigerator.<sup>3</sup>

Those who seek joy in the world are enemies of the cross. They rob the cross of its power. They deny the sufficiency of Christ to satisfy. Their lives point to dry cisterns.

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<sup>3</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*, (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1986), p. 78.

Look at verse 18:

Their end is destruction.

You cannot have Christ and the world. It is not as if you can claim Christ, tick Christian on the census form, but still seek the pleasures of this world and then at death squeak into heaven. They are not disciples of Christ. They are headed for hell.

In Luke 14, Jesus made these statements:

If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. ... So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.

Note the words – *cannot* be My disciple. You *must* renounce the world if you want Christ. You cannot have Christ and the world.

Their god is their appetite.

Instead of being focussed on the Lord, they are focussed on the pleasures of this life – food, wine, women, cars, homes, holidays. They read the stock market report before their Bible. They put money into their trip to Tuscany but not into supporting missionaries to Ethiopia. They store up treasure on earth not in heaven.

Their glory is in their shame.

They actually boast about the things that should shame them. They boast in their worldliness.

I have met men who claim Christ, but have the hide to boast about their mistresses. They glory in what is shame.

And finally Paul sums it all up in this:

They set their minds on earthly things.

They worry about food and clothes – not righteousness and the kingdom.

They worry about the mortgage payment of tomorrow not the judgment to come.

1 John 2:15 says:

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

You cannot have Christ and the world.

James 4:4 adds this:

Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

They are enemies of the cross. Do not believe them when they boast that the world satisfies. Read Ecclesiastes. Solomon had more gold, glory and girls than anyone and it was all emptiness without the Lord.

Only Christ satisfies. Only Christ has life.

Not only that, but to look elsewhere is to render our service for Christ impotent.

C. S. Lewis told of the results of worldliness:

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

A focus on the world renders us impotent for Christ.

Brothers and sisters, we live in an age and a country that is as worldly as it gets. And one of the great tragedies is that in the name of relevance, the church has said it is OK to become like the world – to seek some of the pleasures of this world.

We are assailed by advertising that tells us that we have to have a Mazda RX7 to be really happy. It looks snappy, drives like a dream and your secretary will love it.

And then 'Which Bank' will finance it at the bargain basement rate of 15.4%.

And to have all of this you only need to work an extra twelve hours a week, cut down on family time, drop back your giving, miss evening service and skip your quiet times.

But the world says – this is where happiness is. And the church is buying it.

We see the results everywhere. So many who don't find time for devotions. Evening services that are empty. Prayer meetings with bare attendance. Parents who want their children to be doctors and lawyers not missionaries and pastors. Giving that drops off. Sin in the church. Worldliness as a focus.

We have become relevant to the world and irrelevant to Christ.

But this will never lead to us knowing the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.

This will never lead to true joy – even in this life. It is a dry cistern. A shrivelled peach.

If you wonder why you don't have the joy and power and peace that the Word promises – find out if you are seeking them in the things of Christ or the things of this world.

It is a lie to suggest that you can have Christ and the world. Follow this path and it will be bitterness now and destruction in the end. Show me the man and woman whose mind is set on earthly things who is truly satisfied?

They don't exist!

Harry Blamires in his wonderful little book *The Christian Mind*, said:

To think secularly is to think within a frame of reference bounded by the limits of our life on earth: it is to keep one's calculations rooted in this-worldly criteria.

To think Christianly is to accept all things with the mind as related, directly or indirectly, to man's eternal destiny as the redeemed and chosen child of God.<sup>4</sup>

Blamires is right. The Christian sets his mind on the things of eternity. This is the path of life. We resolutely set our mind. We focus on glory. And nothing will divert us.

And Paul points to this in verses 20 and 21:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Here we find those whose mind is on the glories to come.

All around Australia, we have detention camps where refugees wait eagerly to hear if they have been granted their greatest desire – to receive Australian citizenship.

Like them, we are waiting. But we are not waiting to hear whether or not we have been given citizenship in heaven. We have already been granted citizenship. It was paid for, guaranteed and written in the blood of Calvary. We are merely waiting for the day when we enter into the land that is ours by right of the new birth.

And as citizens of heaven – our hearts, our concerns, our passions are for the kingdom – not for this dying world.

This world is passing away. We are passing away. Why store up treasure here? Send it on to glory? Why focus our time on the world? Focus on Christ – our Lord forever. Why seek satisfaction in dry cisterns? Seek it in the living waters.

The picture is this. We are fish out of water. We are in the world – but we belong to heaven. We are just preparing for the day when we go to our real home. The day when Christ will come for us. If we are dead, we will be raised. If we are living we will be

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<sup>4</sup> Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1963), p. 44.

raptured. And we will be transformed into the body of His glory. We will become what we were destined to be.

It is the hope and right of every child of God.

Jonathan Edwards commented on the glory that awaits us:

Were God to disclose but a little of that which is seen by saints and angels in heaven, our frail natures would sink under it. ... Such a bubble is too weak to bear a weight so vast.<sup>5</sup>

Heaven is so magnificent we can only get a few glimpses of the glory that awaits us.

Who would swap the glory of heaven for the dust of earth?

What can earthly citizenship offer? – Fleeting pleasures that fade, then death, then to be numbered among the goats, to not have your name found in the Lamb's book of life, to hear – depart from me you who practice iniquity and to enter a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth where the torment is eternal.

But heavenly citizenship offers – True pleasures that never fade, then death, then to be numbered among the sheep, to have your name found in the Lamb's book of life, to hear – well done good and faithful servant, enter into your rest and to enter a place of joy, peace and love where the blessing is eternal.

That is why it is no burden to press on to the prize. The prize is Christ. Joy now and blessings eternal. The prize is beyond cost.

Matthew 13:44-46:

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Christ is worth any cost, any sacrifice. The world cannot compare.

In his book, *The Christian's Journey*, Octavius Winslow speaks of heaven:

Jesus says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth. Do not worry about your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; neither for your body, what you shall wear."

We are passing through this fallen world to glory. And the command of our Lord is, that we be constantly forgetting the things that are seen and temporal; nor

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Philip Yancey, *Reaching For the Invisible God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) p. 121.

regard the world, its possessions and attractions; in the anticipation of the world of glory that is before us.

The follower of Christ is to consider earth's wealth and glory, this world's pleasures and politics, as nothing to him; and constantly detaching himself from the things that are earthly and temporal, he is to be pressing forward to things heavenly and eternal.

How many a child of God, who should be growing in grace and advancing in heavenliness, is constantly clogging his feet with earth's clay, weaving around him the net and the mesh of earthly, carnal, sensual engagements; thus impeding his spiritual progress! How can he grow in grace and heavenly mindedness if this be so? It is utterly impossible!

You must become more dead to earth, more crucified to the world, and realise more the power of Christ's resurrection in your soul.

Jesus says to you emphatically, "Do not regard earthly possessions, your belongings, your worldly advantage. Do not regret not the loss and sacrifice of home, friends, and property, that you make for your attachment to me, my service, and my cause. Count it all as vanity and dross; gird up your mind to endure my shame, to share my reproach, yes, to deny all ungodliness, to come out of the world and be my cross bearing disciples. I have laid up for you treasure in heaven, infinite wealth, an inheritance that is incorruptible, riches that perish not, joys that do not glut, a crown of glory that does not fade away. Count the world as loss, all created good as dross, and the creature itself as vanity, for the glory, and honour, and immortality that will soon be yours!"

Thus would our blessed Lord teach, cheer, and animate us in our heavenly journey, by bidding us cease from needless earthly care, and cultivate the spirit, the mind, and the hopes of pilgrims travelling to the celestial city!

God give us grace to lay to heart these exhortations to heavenly mindedness! We are but crossing a desert land on our way home to Christ! He has promised that our bread and our water shall be sure, and that we shall lack no good thing.

Upon Him, then, let us cast our care, anxious for nothing except how we may so walk as to please Him in all things.

Brothers and sisters. Our great and glorious Lord chose us as his precious children.

He set us on the path to glory. He gave us His Word and His Spirit. He promised to be with us until the end of the age. When we are faithful, holy and obedient – He showers us with blessings along the way. And then when this life is done – heaven will open and we will be ushered into eternal glory.

Who would even think of swapping this for anything in this dead and dying world?

We are the most blessed of men. We have a birthright of infinite cost. And nothing can take it away.

I love *Pilgrim's Progress*. But ever since I first read it many years ago, my favourite section has been the end. After a lifetime of wonders, Pilgrim, citizen of heaven, enters his eternal rest. Let me read it for you. Enjoy this glimpse of the day you claim the right of your heavenly citizenship:

There, said they, is "Mount Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect." Heb. 12:22-24. You are going now, said they, to the paradise of God, wherein you shall see the tree of life, and eat of the never-fading fruits thereof: and when you come there you shall have white robes given you, and your walk and talk shall be every day with the King, even all the days of eternity. Rev. 2:7; 3:4,5; 22:5. There you shall not see again such things as you saw when you were in the lower region upon earth; to wit, sorrow, sickness, affliction, and death; "For the former things are passed away." Rev. 21:4. You are going now to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob, and to the prophets, men that God hath taken away from the evil to come, and that are now "resting upon their beds, each one walking in his righteousness."

The men then asked, What must we do in the holy place? To whom it was answered, You must there receive the comfort of all your toil, and have joy for all your sorrow; you must reap what you have sown, even the fruit of all your prayers, and tears, and sufferings for the King by the way. Gal. 6:7,8. In that place you must wear crowns of gold, and enjoy the perpetual sight and vision of the Holy One; for "there you shall see him as he is." 1 John, 3:2. There also you shall serve him continually with praise, with shouting and thanksgiving, whom you desired to serve in the world, though with much difficulty, because of the infirmity of your flesh. There your eyes shall be delighted with seeing, and your ears with hearing the pleasant voice of the Mighty One. There you shall enjoy your friends again that are gone thither before you; and there you shall with joy receive even every one that follows into the holy place after you. There also you shall be clothed with glory and majesty, and put into an equipage fit to ride out with the King of Glory. When he shall come with sound of trumpet in the clouds, as upon the wings of the wind, you shall come with him; and when he shall sit upon the throne of judgment, you shall sit by him.

... Then the heavenly host gave a great shout, saying, "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb." Rev. 19:9.

... Now when they were come up to the gate, there was written over it, in letters of gold,

"BLESSED ARE THEY THAT DO HIS COMMANDMENTS, THAT THEY MAY HAVE RIGHT TO THE TREE OF LIFE, AND MAY ENTER IN THROUGH THE GATES INTO THE CITY."

... Now I saw in my dream, that these two men went in at the gate; and lo, as they entered, they were transfigured; and they had raiment put on that shone like gold. There were also that met them with harps and crowns, and gave them to them; the harps to praise withal, and the crowns in token of honour. Then I heard in my dream, that all the bells in the city rang again for joy, and that it was said unto them,

"ENTER YE INTO THE JOY OF YOUR LORD."

I also heard the men themselves, that they sang with a loud voice, saying,  
“BLESSING, AND HONOR, AND GLORY, AND POWER, BE UNTO HIM THAT SITTETH UPON THE THRONE, AND  
UNTO THE LAMB, FOR EVER AND EVER.”