

## Citizens of Heaven Philippians 1:1-2

The book of Philippians teaches us how to live as citizens of heaven in a fallen world, and it begins by revealing the new identity we have in Christ. We are His saints, His slaves, and His servant-leaders.

### **As some of you know: I can't see much out of my right eye**

- because 9 years ago a tiny hole opened under my retina, let fluid rush in and ruin my vision
- for a while I saw double – very hard to live with so I wore an eye patch
- led to no end of pirate preacher jokes – including all these wonderful drawings!
- fortunately the patch is gone because my brain just tunes out that eye almost all the time

### **What surprised me:**

#### **Something so small can have such a profound effect on my perception of the world**

- if I close good eye ½ of you instantly disappear and other ½ don't look human anymore!
- all because of a tiny microscopic hole

#### **That's a perfect metaphor for the book of Philippians**

- a tiny book of just 4 chapters – shorter than most magazine articles
- yet can have a profound effect on how we see our world – totally disproportionate!
- changed my goals, my values, and my behavior at a crucial time – at end of college
- it can change your life for the better as we study it this semester
- can alter the way you see your world, your God, and yourself

### **Let's dig in by surveying the book as a whole – what do we know about Philippians?**

#### **Paul wrote it – and he tells us his own story in the book...**

- **Was an enemy of Jesus: read 3:5-6**
  - a self-righteous Pharisee – believed genetics and behavior earned God's favor
  - so zealous for Judaism he persecuted the early church – enslaved and executed
  - Trip to Damascus to hunt down more believers – Jesus revealed Himself to Paul
  - Paul repented, believed... became Apostle to the Gentiles – 180° turn!
  - Planted churches throughout the Roman world & wrote much of New Testament
- **Now a prisoner for Jesus: read 1:12-13**
  - in prison, probably in Rome based on reference to "Praetorian guard"

#### **To the church in Philippi**

- **First church founded in Europe**
  - Planted by Paul ~10 yrs before this letter was written – recorded in Acts 16
  - 1<sup>st</sup> convert a woman named Lydia - women played significant role in this church
- Church of Philippi had proven incredibly faithful as servants of Jesus and partners of Paul
  - frequent financial gifts – an example to other churches of partnering in missions
  - very good friends with Paul – he never mentions his "apostleship" because partners
- They live in a very significant city – Philippi possessed the Italic Right

- Unlike in other cities, people born in Philippi were given full Roman citizenship
  - Governed by Roman Law
  - No torture or death without a fair trial
  - Right to own, sell, and transfer land
  - No taxes!
- With exception of last one those sound like rights every person should have
- But it wasn't that way in ancient world – very few people had Roman citizenship
- So you can imagine how important their Roman citizenship was them
  - set them apart – probably most valuable thing they had in life

So no surprise that Paul focuses so much of Philippians on the **THEME of CITIZENSHIP**

- **The whole book tells us what it means to be citizens**
- But not talking about Roman citizenship, talking about something more significant...
- **read 3:20** – we are citizens of HEAVEN
- **Philippians answers the Q: “What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven?”**
  - What **privileges** does it give us?
  - What **priorities** does it demand of us?
  - Every verse fits into one of those 2 categories

They needed to remember their privileges and priorities as citizens of heaven...

...because they were **beginning to face serious challenges** as a church:

- **disunity** – pride and selfishness threatened to tear them apart and make them ineffective
- **false teaching** – heretical teachers were infiltrating their church to try to lead them astray from the simple truth of the gospel
- **persecution** – like Paul, they were beginning to suffer for their allegiance to Christ

**These are threats almost every church, including our own, faces**

- Pride, selfishness, and disunity are always a threat to any church
- False teaching is prevalent today just as it was back then
- Though we haven't yet been imprisoned for our faith, we too face suffering of other kinds because of our allegiance to Christ, and that suffering is likely to grow

**Philippians helps us understand how to live as good citizens of heaven in a fallen world**

- Each passage will help us understand privileges and priorities of our heavenly citizenship
- This week we start with a very short yet profound passage...

**Read 1:1-2**

- Not just a greeting to skip over to get to the meat of the letter... it's full of theology!

They tell us that... **Our heavenly citizenship gives us a new identity**

- When you became a Christian, your citizenship changed... became a citizen of heaven
  - that new citizenship gave you a new legal identity
- **like if a person immigrates to the US and goes through the citizenship process**
  - there comes a day when he/she is sworn in as a new citizen of the United States
  - when that day is complete, they now have a new legal identity
  - result: they get a new passport, a voter ID, lots of new identification documents

- their legal identity – with all its rights and responsibilities – has changed
- So for us – we have a new identity founded in Christ – He’s mentioned 3 times in these 2 verses
- that new identity includes three facets

### Your New Identity in 3 parts:

#### 1. SAINTS in Christ Jesus

- saint = *hagios* = “that which is holy – set apart to God”
- **When used as a title for a group = those set apart by God from the rest of humanity**
  - it refers more to our identity than to our behavior
  - saints should act in a holy way, but no matter how you act, if you’ve trusted in Jesus you are, by definition, a saint because God has set you apart from the world
- **You are a saint because God chose you to be a saint – not because you earned it**
  - **Romans 1:7**  
to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - We did not make ourselves saints; God chose us in love to become saints
- **And what privileges do we receive as saints? Grace and Peace**
  - You see that both in Phil 1 and Rom 1
- **Now be clear: we don’t deserve grace and peace from God**
  - we are all sinners – we’ve all done things we know are wrong – things that have hurt other people and dishonored God
  - we deserve judgment from God
- **But He gives us grace and peace instead... and He gives them to us “in Christ”**
  - Jesus is our source of God’s grace and peace – come to us through Him
- **ill: It’s like what my brother did for me in High School**
  - Won an essay contest – grand prize was a trip for whole family to Disneyworld
  - I got to go to Disneyworld “in Matt Jennings”
  - I put in no work; he did it all; I simply benefited because I was in relationship with him
- **That’s exactly how it works for us “in Christ”**
  - He earned God’s grace and peace... we did not
    - He was the one who lived a perfect, sinless life
    - He was the one who died an innocent death
    - He was the one who rose from the dead conquering sin and death
  - Through His life, death, and resurrection He earned eternal peace & infinite grace
- **And He shares them with everyone united with Him in faith – read Phil 3:9**
  - We don’t earn righteousness through our good deeds
  - We receive it as a free gift through faith
- **So let’s make this very practical – what must you do to become a saint in Christ?**
- **Just say “thank you”!**
  - We talked about this last week – don’t make the gospel complicated
  - Simply acknowledge that you are a sinner who can’t earn God’s grace and peace
  - Then give thanks to Jesus for living, dying, and rising for you so that you could have God’s grace and peace as a free gift

- The moment you say “thank you” to Jesus for His gift of eternal life, you become a saint
  - You begin to receive God’s grace and peace now
  - And you will continue to receive God’s grace and peace for all eternity

## 2. SLAVES of Christ

- **doulos = “slave,” not a hired servant**
- **We are not employees of Jesus... we are slaves of Jesus**
  - Means that we owe Him obedience in every area of life
- **We are not His equals... we belong to Him... He owns every fiber of our being**
  - Abraham Kuyper  
There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!
  - That’s what it means to be a slave – everything you are and have belongs to Him
- **Now at first blush, that sounds pretty negative, doesn’t it?**
  - We don’t like the term slave, and rightly so – slavery in our world is awful
  - Slavery to human masters means obedience out of compulsion and fear
- But that’s not what slavery to Christ means
- **Being a slave of Jesus Christ is actually a great privilege for two reasons:**
- **Reason #1:**
  - Read 2:5-8 – Note v7 – the same term is used of Christ!
  - Jesus did not take on the form of a human king, but of a human slave
  - In incarnation, He renounced rights and privileges that belonged to Him as God
  - Then He died a slave’s death – how slaves were killed in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century!
  - **So reason #1 = because Jesus was a slave first... and it was for us, for our salvation**
  - We obey Christ not out of obligation but out of gratitude because He was a slave first
  - And He willingly died a slave’s death to deliver us from penalty & tyranny of sin
- **Reason #2:**
  - **Romans 6:16**  
Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?
  - We were and will always be slaves of something!
  - You are either a slave of sin or of obedience, meaning a slave to Jesus
  - There is no third option here – you can’t choose not to be a slave!
  - You will be a slave to whichever spiritual master you follow, either sin or Jesus
  - And choosing Jesus is very much better!
  - Matthew 11:29  
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
  - “yoke” = slave language – we are slaves and Jesus is master
  - But He is a gentle and kind master who will give rest to our souls
  - Do you think that sin will treat you that well? No! Sin always leads to suffering
    - It may not feel that way – sin can, for a time, feel very pleasurable
    - but its end is always pain and loss and destruction

- **So reason #2 – because slavery to Jesus is infinitely better than the alternative**
- Summary – 2nd facet of our identity as heavenly citizens = slaves of Jesus Christ
  - means we have a duty to obey Him in every area of life
- **Apply: Are you living as a slave of Christ, or are you giving in to the slavery of sin?**
  - You are not free – you can't be free. You are following one of those masters
  - Beginning of another school year → perfect time to rededicate yourself to Jesus
  - Commit to follow Him in every area of life
  - He will give you strength to obey through His Spirit and His Word
  - But you have to choose to follow Him as your Master rather than follow sin
  - Is there some sinful area of your life, a dark corner you've allowed to fester?
  - Turn that over to Him today – ask Him to forgive you and grow you in obedience
  - Ask a friend or family member to hold you accountable, check up on you

### 3. SERVANT-LEADERS for Christ

- **Paul mentions 2 leadership positions in the church:**
  - **“overseers”** – those who protect church from false teaching, division, immorality
    - = elders → men who lead and protect the church
  - **“deacons”** – related to the verb for serving someone
    - = believers who serve material needs of the church in an official capacity
    - = our deacons and probably many of our staff
- **Paul is reminding us: as heavenly citizens we can become servant-leaders for Christ**
- Not everyone is called to be an elder or deacon...
- **But every one of us is called to some form of servant-leadership**
  - training up children, either your own or someone else's
  - mentoring a younger believer
  - leading a small group
  - overseeing a ministry team
  - leading a charity in town
- That's a privileged opportunity that flows out of our identity as citizens of heaven
- **It's a privilege because God doesn't need our leadership**
  - He doesn't need any of us – He could do a much better job of leading our families, our church, our community than any of us
  - But in grace God lovingly offers us the opportunity to join His work
  - It's like when my dad let me help him work on a car when I was very young. He didn't need my help and could have done the job quicker if I wasn't helping. But my dad loved me and wanted me to learn from him, so he graciously invited me to participate in his work.
  - I'm doing the same with my kids – here's Luke tightening a bolt – taking about triple the time it would take me – but it still thrills me to invite him into my work
- God treats us the same way – He graciously invites citizens of heaven to join in His kingdom building work. He invites all believers to step into some form of spiritual leadership and help others discover and grow in their relationship with Christ.
- That opportunity belongs to you as a citizen of heaven.
- **Apply: Have you chosen to step up as a servant-leader to help others find and follow Jesus? Many of you have walked with the Lord long enough to be mentoring a younger believer. Some of you are spiritually**

mature enough to be leading a Bible study. Some of you have gifts of service or teaching or administration that could bring excellence to some ministry inside or outside the church, or some charity here in the community. So, what's keeping you back?

- If you're looking for opportunities to serve or lead, come talk to one of the staff and we'll direct you to the right opportunity. Don't miss this incredible privilege of joining in the Father's kingdom building work as His servant-leaders.

If you've trusted in Jesus, then you are now a citizen of heaven and that citizenship carries a new identity:

- You are a SAINT IN CHRIST – because Jesus poured out His life on the cross for you
- You are a SLAVE OF CHRIST – called to pour out your life in obedience to Jesus so that more people will find and follow Him
- You are a SERVANT-LEADER FOR CHRIST – called graciously by God to join His work of reaching this world with the love and compassion of Jesus

May we each live out of that new identity this week!