

# Citizens of Earth and Heaven

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## Philippians 3:12-21

<sup>12</sup> Not that I already obtained this or have already been brought to maturity/perfection, but I press on to make it my own, because Messiah Jesus has made me his own.

<sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have made it my own. One thing rather: forgetting the things behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Messiah Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> Let those of us who are mature think this, and if you are thinking something otherwise, God will reveal this also to you. <sup>16</sup> Only stay in step with the same, which we have reached.

<sup>17</sup> Brothers and sisters, become my fellow-imitators, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

<sup>18</sup> For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of the Messiah. <sup>19</sup> whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory in their shame, who think only of earthbound things.

<sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, LORD Jesus Messiah, <sup>21</sup> 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.

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## Philippians 2:1-2, 5-8

<sup>1</sup> So if there is any encouragement in the Messiah, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any deep feeling and compassion, <sup>2</sup> fill up my joy that you think the same thing, having the same love, together in soul and thinking the one thing. ...

<sup>5</sup> Think this among yourselves, which also means in Messiah Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not consider that equality with God a thing to be exploited, <sup>7</sup> rather he emptied himself, by taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human shape, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ...

## 1 Corinthians 1:17-18, 21-24

<sup>17</sup> For Messiah did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of the Messiah be emptied of its power. <sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ...

<sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Messiah the power of God and the wisdom of God.

## Philippians 1:27

<sup>27</sup> Only let your life as citizens of a community be worthy of the good news of the Messiah, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one Spirit, with one soul striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

## Ephesians 2:11-15

<sup>11</sup> At one time you Gentiles in the flesh, ... <sup>12</sup> were at that time separated from the Messiah, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Messiah Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one ... <sup>15</sup> that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, so making peace.

## Called Toward a Goal

Paul, an educated Pharisee, a Roman citizen, called by Jesus the Messiah to a new life is writing from prison to the mixed community (mostly non-Jewish) in Philippi. His message has changed their lives. Now he is trying to give them the core resources – the story of Jesus' life, death, resurrection; examples to imitate – so that they can internalize it and be changed from the inside out, learn true love and discernment (1:9-10).

Most Roman and Greek religions made little or no difference in one's beliefs or practices.

Paul had experienced how he could be blameless in Torah, but still miss God's Messiah.

The Quest for Jesus is never finished, Paul says. It is a strange/wonderful race in which I am continually pursuing him, growing, learning, serving, loving, seeking his will, reaching to grasp it. But only because he has already grasped me, by faithfully giving himself in love for me. Jesus is an event, but also a way of thinking, valuing others, serving, knowing God.

## Learning by Imitation

This massive transformation of life was communicated orally and by example. The Philippians had no New Testament. The Gentiles knew little of Abraham or Israel. Paul came into their lives with this astonishing narrative: Israel's long-expected Anointed King/Messiah, Crucified by a Roman governor, Raised by God to a new kind of life, now Lord of the world, calling both Jews and Gentiles into a new united Humanity, a new life of love.

Paul knows he must take on the role of example for that new life of self-giving love. He is on the same quest, to learn Christ, his life, death, resurrection, to let his life be shaped by Jesus, just as Jesus' showed his love by becoming shaped like us. Be fellow-imitators.

Paul says use every resource: Imitate Christ, imitate me as I imitate Christ, imitate others who are walking the same path. Keep walking till it's as natural as a child walking, running.

## The Scandal of the Messiah's Cross

Don't underestimate the difficulty. We're not perfect or mature. We're always learners.

That's because at the heart of God's work is the Messiah's crucifixion – something so horrible, beautiful, mysterious, inexhaustible, revealing – that we will never master it.

It makes enemies. It is God's power in weakness, wisdom in foolishness. It is a stumbling block and folly. It is not what people want to hear about the great God of the universe.

Paul knew that he himself had been an enemy of that Cross. (Cf. Peter, Mk 8:31-34). Many Jews rejected the idea of a crucified Messiah/King, a contradiction. For many Gentiles it was no better, following someone judged by Rome's governor as a base criminal.

But it is only that one – equal to God, becoming man, obedient to death, exalted as God – who can break us free from our self-destruction, false gods and glory, earthbound vision.

## True Citizens of the World

Paul is a Roman citizen in a Roman jail. He's vulnerable and ultimately will be beheaded by a Roman court. He values that citizenship but doesn't deify it. The true Lord of the World was executed by the great empire. But Rome's power, all human power, ends at death.

He and other believers share a citizenship beyond Rome, encompassing all nations, peoples, continents, times. It claims all the earth as God's creation. It's Lord overcame even the power of death through his death and in his resurrection created new life.

This world is his to transform and renew. With him we must love the world and seek its good in every way, because we belong to it's true Lord. We await his coming as we live his love.