

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-21

THE CITIZEN OF AN UNSEEN COUNTRY

“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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.”¹

I am a citizen of the United States of America by birth. I am a citizen of Canada by choice. I am a citizen of Heaven by the grace of God through the New Birth. Citizenship identifies each of us in numerous ways. Citizenship reveals something of our approach to life, our commitment to ideals and our investment in others. As twice-born Christians, we lay claim to an eternal citizenship. The Christian is a citizen of an unseen country.

DIVINE CITIZENSHIP IS REVEALED THROUGH LIFE — “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”

Paul makes a plea for readers to study his life, and also to study the life of others who follow his example. While this sounds somewhat egocentric, Paul calls for those reading the letter to follow his example precisely because he is following Christ. Recall a similar challenge to the Corinthian Christians: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 11:1]. Christians are responsible to assess the lifestyle of those professing to be leaders. Paul cautions that leaders who are focused on enriching themselves are “enemies of the cross of Christ.” Christians who “glory in their shame [because their] minds [are] set on earthly things” are “enemies of the cross of Christ.” Focus on the self creates enemies of the cross of Christ.

This introduces an important point—*Christians are called to a cruciform existence*. This statement calls us to life marked by the cross as evidenced by suffering on behalf of Christ.² Paul has repeatedly pointed to the crucified life as his model. Perhaps you will recall the Apostle’s powerful words included in the Letter to the Christians of Galatia: “Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” [GALATIANS 2:19, 20].

Earlier in this Philippian letter, Paul wrote of his choice to live a life marked by sacrifice. “Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me” [PHILIPPIANS 2:17, 28]. Paul also pointed to those who were sharing his missionary life as living a cruciform existence—Timothy [see PHILIPPIANS 2:19-24] and Epaphroditus [see PHILIPPIANS 2:25-30]. These examples demonstrate that for Paul, this life was not merely theoretical—it was practical!

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² See Gordon D. Fee, **Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament** (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1995) 363

Jesus Christ must be the focus of life in order to know the joy and spiritual strength the Apostle is presenting as the heritage of all believers. To live other than a crucified life is to jettison the very benefits that should mark us as followers of the Master. Two concepts are presented throughout this portion of the Letter: either one lives for this present world, in which case all that is accumulated vanishes with death; or one lives for the unseen country of which we are citizens by faith in Christ. In this latter case, we are laying up treasures for eternity.

If I attempt to use faith in the Risen Saviour as a tool to enrich myself, if I claim that by saying the right words I can accumulate earthly goods, any claim to the biblical life marked by godly sacrifice has been invalidated. The preacher who transforms the promises of God into a path to personal wealth and comfort in this life has set himself in opposition to the Word of God. Such an individual has become an “enem[y] of the cross of Christ.”

Paul had demonstrated his thinking before he wrote the words of our text. He wrote, “One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained” [PHILIPPIANS 3:13b-16].

Notice how this model for life is singular in focus. The Apostle was not looking back to wealth or recognition that once motivated his service as a Pharisee; his view was forward looking to honour Christ the Lord. Paul’s goal was to glorify Christ who redeemed him and appointed him to divine service. Mature Christians think this same way. To focus on personal comfort and ease of life reveals that an individual is immature at best, or unsaved at worst!

If you harbour any doubt that this is an accurate assessment of the Apostle’s meaning, it is assuredly dispelled by looking at the verses with which he opens this particular chapter. “Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” [PHILIPPIANS 3:2-11].

This is at once one of the most powerful and one of the most humbling challenges presented in the universe of Apostolic writings. The Apostle cautions readers not to rely on achievements of the flesh because they will keep us from embracing righteous thinking.

Ritual—rubbish! **Religious heritage**—trash! **Religious zealotry**—refuse! **Academic achievements**—garbage! **Human assessment**—offal! Paul’s words are powerful in destroying our assessment of all that we have and in destroying anything that others may think of us. “Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish” [PHILIPPIANS 3:7-9a].

Let me state clearly for the record—baptism is worthless outside of Christ. I say this for the benefit of some who hear my words. Because we understand that baptism is of no value outside of the Lord Jesus, we cannot perform a ritual on infants who are incapable of making a choice to follow Christ. In the absence of the new birth, dripping water on an infant's head is a meaningless act. The ritual is equally meaningless when it is performed on an adult who has no faith in the Saviour. Those who will identify with the Master are called to confess Him openly as Master of life *before* identifying with Him—first, faith; then, baptism.

Participating in the Communion Meal has no purpose outside of Christ. Benighted souls who think of this act of worship as a sort of family ritual, or who treat the sacred meal as a kind of religious exercise to make them acceptable to God are deceiving themselves. Even those who are born from above must know that failure to realise what he or she is doing at the Table of the Lord invite divine judgement. This is the reason Paul has warned, “Anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died” [1 CORINTHIANS 11:29, 30].

Whether your parents or your grandparents standing before God has no meaning for you—you must be born again. Whether you attended Sunday School, won Awana awards, joined a Pioneer Club or participated in a Backyard Bible Club is of no merit before God—you must still personally respond to the Son of God. Attending worship services, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, reciting prayers, reading the Bible or memorising Scripture are all religious garbage if while doing these things you fail to develop a relationship with the Risen Lord of Glory. What others think of you, whether they imagine you to be a “good Christian,” is immaterial if there has been no transformation resulting from the second birth.

I do not say that one is saved through conduct; however, redeemed people want to honour the sovereign head of the eternal homeland. We seek to honour those who govern because we are taught to do so in the Word of God. I grew up hearing stories of “the ugly American.” Perhaps you are conscious of how your conduct reflects on Canada; certainly, that is a concern for me. Consequently, you take pains not to be rude to foreigners, you are careful not to be crass when interacting with those who are not from Canada and you avoid being unkind toward those who are not from here. It is natural to be proud of one's identity; and part of that pride is that the citizen does not want to dishonour the national image.

Whenever a significant proportion of the population begins to disparage the head of the nation, or whenever a significant proportion of the population refuses to honour the office of the leadership of the nation, that is a nation that is in trouble. It matters not how strong the armed forces or how wealthy the nation is, when the populace begins to live a life that dishonours the nation, that nation is revealing serious damage to the foundations. Similarly, when a nation forgets its religious roots, it is a nation already circling the drain.

It is difficult to move against the stream of anything, especially in the current culture. Contemporary Christians appear more likely to quit pushing against the tide and go with the flow. In a recent presentation at a conference sponsored by The Gospel Coalition, Dr. Russell Moore made a significant statement. He emphasised that the next generation is going to have to walk alone. He was not saying that our Lord is not with us or that churches fail to provide community. Instead, he was encouraging the faithful to be realistic about the current state of our culture, a culture which has its eyes blinded and hearts hardened to God.³

³ Jesse Jackson, “Russell Moore: Next Generation Must Be Willing to Be Crucified Over Cultural Marginalization,” Church Leaders, http://churchleaders.com/news/301734-russell-moore-next-generation-must-willing-crucified-cultural-marginalization.html?utm_source=outreach-cl-daily-nl&utm_medium=email&utm_content=text-

Dr. Moore referred to a passage found in John's Gospel. "Jesus said to [the crowd around Him], 'The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.'

"When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

‘Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’

Therefore, they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,

‘He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
lest they see with their eyes,
and understand with their heart, and turn,
and I would heal them.’”

[JOHN 12:35-40]

In the face of this reality, congregations need to disciple others, living out courage in Jesus Christ. This is what is required of the next generation of Christians if they will succeed in the Faith. In a summary of Moore's presentation, the reporter provided these takeaways:

- Clarity is not enough. Clarity without courage will amount to nothing in the witness of the church.
- When the culture around you has marginalized you, that is when courage becomes difficult.
- Courage is not **FEARLESSNESS**. Courage is crucified **FEARLESSNESS**.
- Jesus sees the unseen storyline and he's willing to walk there anyway because he sees what God is doing.
- Jesus was willing to face the loneliness of cultural rejection for the sake of community later.
- **SUCCESS** is not being normal; **SUCCESS** is being crucified.

In light of the text today, I am compelled to ask whether contemporary Christians are now redefining success? Ask yourself some questions. Why do you serve the Master? Why not secure a better place for yourself? Are you standing against the tide in order to rescue the next generation? Or are you surrendering to the inexorable push against the Faith in order to accommodate this dying world? As a follower of the Saviour, do you live out the Faith regardless of the cost? Or has living out the Faith become a mere duty that must be performed in order to feel good about yourself and to gain the praise of a few other professing Christians? Have the threats of the wolves caused you to run away in panic? Or are you standing firm?

These are hard questions that must be answered if we will honour the Master. Nevertheless, know that the next generation which has been entrusted to us is watching to see how we respond to the present challenge. That generation which follows will die aborning if they fail to see those of us who are now in the Faith courageously defending the gospel. If the current crop of radio and television preachers or of Internet sensations is any indication, the Faith is in jeopardy—serious jeopardy! The emphasis, both in what is preached and especially in how the professed people of God live, is upon making ourselves comfortable in this present, dying world. Such modelling is failure of the faithful! The most convicting statement from Dr. Moore’s message must surely be: “If we model to the next generation that rejection is failure, then we are dooming the next generation to not be able to uphold the truths of the gospel.”

Surely, the warning of the Prophet applies to contemporary Christendom!

“Woe to those who are at ease in Zion,
and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria,
the notable men of the first of the nations,
to whom the house of Israel comes!
Pass over to Calneh, and see,
and from there go to Hamath the great;
then go down to Gath of the Philistines.
Are you better than these kingdoms?
Or is their territory greater than your territory,
O you who put far away the day of disaster
and bring near the seat of violence?

“Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory
and stretch themselves out on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock
and calves from the midst of the stall,
who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp
and like David invent for themselves instruments of music,
who drink wine in bowls
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!”

[AMOS 6:1-6]

I urge you to carry away one thought: *how we live demonstrates our divine citizenship*. If the world does not recognise us as Ambassadors of Heaven, it must be because we have allowed ourselves to be compromised by the world in which we live. We must again hear the Apostolic command. “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-make you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed. Thus you will prove in practise that the will of God is good, acceptable and perfect” [ROMANS 12:2].⁴

DIVINE CITIZENSHIP IS REFLECTED IN CONFIDENCE — “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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.”

⁴ J. B. Phillips, **The New Testament in Modern English** (William Collins Sons & Co., Ltd., Glasgow, 1960, 1970)

Those who possess divine citizenship live with confidence. They serve with confidence because they know they are appointed to the service they perform. They walk boldly before the watching world because they know they are accepted in the Beloved Son. Have you ever noticed how frequently the disciples are said to act boldly after the Spirit was given?

On one occasion, Peter and John were haled before the Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin. The leaders of the nation were distressed that the disciples were preaching in the Name of Jesus. They threatened the two men, but Peter and John declared their allegiance to the Risen Lord. Then, Luke makes this observation, “When [the Sanhedrin] saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus” [ACTS 4:13]. Peter and John were bold because they were confident of what had taken place a short while before. Moreover, they were infused with the Spirit of God. The leaders were reduced to blustering, after which they were powerless.

Note what happened after the two men were again threatened and released. “When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, ‘Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

“‘Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed”—

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness” [ACTS 4:23-31]. Pushed toward the Lord, not only these two men but all who had joined in prayer were “filled with the Holy Spirit.” As result, now they continually spoke the Word of God with boldness.

Saul of Tarsus was converted and immediately he began to preach boldly in the Name of Jesus [see ACTS 9:28, 29]. It is always amazing to witness a new convert to Christ the Lord. Salvation breaks out on them like the measles; they cannot be silent concerning the One who set them free. They have to tell somebody what God has done. That’s Saul! Throughout the remainder of his service before the Lord, he was denoted by boldness. In Antioch of Pisidia, when the Jews gathered in the synagogue reject the message of life, Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly [see ACTS 13:46]. The same was true in Iconium as the two men were seen speaking boldly for the Lord [see ACTS 14:3]. In Corinth, we witness the Apostle again speaking boldly, “reasoning and persuading [all who listened] about the Kingdom of God” [ACTS 19:8]. When compelled to stand before Agrippa, Bernice and Festus, Paul testified, “To [the king] I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of [the things of which I speak] has escaped his notice” [ACTS 26:26].

Writing the Christians in Thessalonica, the Apostle reminded them the circumstances that led him to come to them despite the shameful treatment the missionaries had received in Philippi. “You yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict” [1 THESSALONIANS 2:1, 2].

In the Ephesian encyclical, the Apostle wrote of his service before the Lord. “Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” Then, turning the attention of his readers to what this means for each one, Paul writes, “This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him” [EPHESIANS 3:7-12].

To the end of his life, Paul’s service was marked by holy boldness. That same boldness marks the child of God to this day. Note that the Book of Acts concludes with the Apostle “proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness” [ACTS 28:31].

The citizen of Heaven is characterised by confidence. According to what is written in the Letter to Hebrew Christians, we have confidence to draw near to the throne of grace, knowing that we will receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need [see HEBREWS 4:16]. “We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus” [HEBREWS 10:19]. We have confidence to declare,

“The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear;
what can man do to me?”

[HEBREWS 13:6]

The citizen of Heaven has confidence through Christ toward God that He will work out His perfect will through His child [see 2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-4]. One day soon, Christ our Master is coming to receive us to Himself. When He comes, we shall be gathered to Him. What a day when all the redeemed of God shall be called into His presence. The graves will open, and those who have died in the Lord will come forth to meet Him in the air. We who are alive and remain shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and we shall be gathered with them to meet the Master in the air. This is why we continue to live godly lives now.

As John has testified, “Now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” [1 JOHN 2:28-3:3].

Again, John testifies, “If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him” [1 JOHN 3:21, 22]. This promise anticipates a truth of which John shall shortly write, “This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him” [1 JOHN 5:14, 15].

The citizen of Heaven is marked by confidence—confidence in God, confidence in all that God has done for His child, confidence in our service presented before the Lord, confidence in the promises of God, confidence that we have an eternal home with God. Any of us may have doubts at various times; but as we invest time in the presence of Christ Jesus, reading His Word and listening to Him as He speaks, we grow in confidence. Like the man born blind after Jesus had given him sight, we are focused on one great truth, “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see” [JOHN 9:25b].

DIVINE CITIZENSHIP IS RECEIVED BY THE SECOND BIRTH AND LEADS US HOME — “The Lord Jesus Christ ... will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.” The older I grow, the more I am aware of the fallen nature of this body. The joints are deteriorating, ensuring that life is defined by pain. The eyes grow dimmer with each passing day. The strength of a young man that once marked my life is draining rapidly. With Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, I acknowledge, “I know that the putting off of my body will be soon” [2 PETER 1:14].

I shan’t live in this body much longer. The grey hairs of my head and in my beard are the messengers of death. The strength of youth long ago receded into a distant memory. The rivers of British Columbia are deeper, wider and swifter than they were a decade ago. The mountains are steeper than I remember them when I first began climbing to the top of those jagged peaks. Each new ache, each new pain, serves to remind me that if Christ should tarry I have a date with death. However, that doesn’t mean that I am finished with my service before the Master. I am confident that I am immortal until the Master calls me home. I shall accomplish all that He has appointed for me. This is the confidence of the child of God.

The Word of God informs me that I am not meant to live eternally in this dying world. This feeble body is corruptible; in Christ, I am promised a body that is incorruptible. This world is fallen, broken and ruined by sin, and this body is likewise contaminated by sin. However, in Christ, I am promised a new body that is no longer under sentence of death, no longer tainted with sin, no longer compelled to struggle against the fallen nature with which I was born. The Apostle has written, “We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” [2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-11].

The greatest days of the Faith lie before us. I don’t know when the Master is returning. I do know that He has given us a command, and we are to fulfil His command, labouring until His return. The Risen Saviour commanded those who would follow Him and who would be called by His Name, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20]. Until He returns, this is our mission, this is our task.

I don't fight the advance of age and the loss of youthful strength; I accept the promise given through Isaiah:

“Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.
Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.”

[ISAIAH 40:28-31]

I will continue to declare this message of grace and life until God is pleased to bring me home. Then, I shall lay down the sword and the shield, relinquishing the battle to those who follow.

I am confident in this truth: Christ the Lord shall shortly call me home. Whether I pass through the chilly waters of death, or whether I am transformed into His image at His return, I know that I shall see Him as He is. This is the hope of all who have put their faith in the Living Saviour, Christ the Lord. Perhaps you will recall and be encouraged by these words from Paul.

“We know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

“So, we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10].

Each citizen of Heaven was appointed to a great task. It is written in the Word, “We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

“Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says,

‘In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.’

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:20-6:2].

The Apostle promises each citizen of Heaven, “The Lord Jesus Christ ... will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.” This is what we anticipate; for this we wait patiently, serving until He comes. Christ Jesus our Lord is coming; and when He comes, we shall be changed. Therefore, we are promised, “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’
‘O death, where is your victory?’
O death, where is your sting?’

“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-57].

This is the hope of the Christian; this is the promise of God. Since the day I first read the words, I have delighted in the manner in which the Apostle speaks of what comes next. I don’t look back, I’m looking forward—and so should every blood-bought child of God! “Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:14-17].

The Apostle follows that statement of what lies before us with an admonition. “Therefore encourage one another with these words” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:18]. What encouragement this is! Changed into His likeness! Changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye! Changed from this corruptible into that which is incorruptible! Changed, so that there is no more mourning! No more crying! No more pain! Changed—death removed forever! Changed, from this darkened world so that we walk in eternal light! Changed! Why would anyone reject this glorious promise to cling to earthly hopelessness?

This, then, is the promise of God. Christ died, taking your sin upon Himself. He was buried, entombed and wrapped in grave clothes. Yet, He broke the bonds of death, rolling aside the stone and coming out of the tomb. Now, He is alive and seated at the right hand of the Father. Now, the promise of God to any who will receive it is, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10]. That divine call concludes with an equally strong promise from God. “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:13].

And that is our invitation to you. Believe this message of life. Receive this Saviour, today. Join us in becoming the citizen of an unseen county. May God give you grace as you receive Him. Amen.