

Title: What Do Heaven's Citizens Look Like?**Text: Philippians 2:1-10****Date: March 10, 2019**

Pat Welty was a beautiful lady. Pat and her husband Jim were two of the first people to reach out to Carrie and I when it was announced that we'd be coming to FBCW.

- Pat was a member of FBCW for many years.
- Last Sunday: Pastor Jim Law, the deacons, and myself anointed Pat with oil and prayed over her. We asked God to either give her a miracle and heal her from the cancer that was ravaging her body, or to give her special mercy/grace going forward, whatever the outcome would be.
- Early Thursday morning, God answered our prayer.
- Today Pat Welty is in heaven.

We know where she is today (heaven)...because we know who she loved/trusted for all of her years on earth (Christ).

One of the key themes of the Apostle Paul's writings is a longing for heaven! Think about this: Pat is in heaven today: gates of pearl...crystal sea...streets of gold...walls of jasper.

- She has a brand-new glorified body.

We don't know everything about heaven. In fact, there's a great deal we don't know. But we do know the Bible teaches this:

2 Cor 5:8, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

1 Cor 2:9, eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered our hearts what God has prepared for the ones who love Him.

1 John 3:2, Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is.

Ask anyone that knew Pat Welty. She is literally and formally in heaven today because for many, many years she has been trusting in Christ.

To use Paul's words in Philippians 1:27, Pat has lived spiritually as a citizen of heaven for years, and now her faith has been made sight.

To quote John Peterson, Pat is in heaven, because years ago...heaven came down and glory filled her soul...

READ the TEXT.

Today's Message: Philippians 1:27 might be the most challenging, intimidating verse in the New Testament. It lays the foundation for Paul's point in this section of Scripture –

- Are you a Christian? Then live like you are a Christian!
- Do you plan to go to heaven? Then live your life in congruence with heaven's values.

Paul says it like this:

Live your life worthy of the Gospel of Christ...(CSB).

Let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ...(NKJV).

You must live in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ...(NLT).

Live worthy? Clearly this cannot and does not mean that my life/behavior could ever measure up to the worth and value of Christ. No, I am not worthy. Indeed, I am forever unworthy of Christ's grace.

When it comes to this understanding of "living worthy" or "seeking to be holy, good, obedient" – there are usually two foolish extremes here:

- 1) One says, *"I can be holy/good enough to merit God's favor."*
- 2) Another says, *"Since I have obtained God's favor (been saved) I can now live however I want. My behavior doesn't matter."*

Both of these are dreadfully wrong!

In other words – don't give yourself too much credit: nothing about you on even your best day merits the grace of God. Our righteousness is like filthy rags to Him (Isaiah 64:6).

But also – we must give all credit to God's grace – I must never abuse God's grace by thinking, *"Now that I've got grace, I can just live however I want."* No!

- Romans 6:15, *"Should we sin because we are now under grace? Absolutely not!"*

We might understand it this way → I cannot behave "worthy enough" to warrant Christ's grace...but because of Christ's grace, as I abide in Him, He will help me live wisely and obey His word.

I'm not good...but Christ is good...so as I abide in Christ...He shows his goodness in me.

I'm called to be holy – but I can't be holy without Christ!

I'm called to be good – but I can't be good without Christ!

I'm called to live worthy – but I can't live worthy without Christ!

FACT: "Live worthy of the Gospel of Christ" means → seek to obey God, even if your obedience costs you in this world.

- Requires intentionality ("live worthy") (v 27).
- Requires endurance ("suffering...struggle") (vv 29-29).

Christianity – living the Christ life – can be rather difficult. Each week we’ve been talking about the Big Idea of Philippians: *some days following Christ is a pleasure, some days following Christ is painful, but every day we follow Christ is worth it.*

If the Bible ended with Philippians 1, we would not be overly encouraged. Notice how Phil 1:30 concludes: *You are engaged in the same struggle that you saw I had, and now hear I have.* The word for struggle means = conflict, tension, or anxiety in a fight. It’s where we get our English word agony. To agonize!

And notice Paul speaks of twofold, or double “struggle” (1:30).

- You saw: when Paul was in Philippi – struggle (put in jail for his faith).
- Now hear: now Paul is likely in Rome – struggle (put in jail for his faith).

I want to say this again – this is not very encouraging at the surface level to say the least.

Can you just hear it now – “Hey, Philippians, you’ve been invited into a religion – where the central figure was crucified, lots of the early followers are being persecuted, the guy who introduced things to you was put in prison, and that same guy now says that if you follow Christ closely, you will also be in personal pain/suffering at times...”

- Whose ready to sign up? This sounds like fun! (NOT)

FACT. Here’s the deal. Either Christians believe God knows about our pain, God cares about us in our pain, and God is ultimately going to do something about our pain – or we are the most pitied people on the planet.

Paul speaks of this at length in 1 Corinthians 15. If Jesus was simply crucified, then Christianity is a sham, and no one should sign up. But if Jesus was indeed resurrected on the third day after his crucifixion – then WOW – the life of Christ is an eternally powerful force, and it must be reckoned with!

So again:

Does God know about our pain? YES.

Does God care about us as we suffer? YES.

Is God actively doing something about our pain? YES.

- John 14 – *He’s gone to prepare a place for us, and He will come again...*

Christianity is the faith/religion of hope! It may be hard today, but one day our faith will be made sight! One day it will all make sense! One day we will stand around the throne of God and say:

- This was worth waiting for!
- I’m so glad I didn’t stop believing!

But today, yes, there may be struggle/agony.

It comes in a variety of forms: lack of faith...doubt...suffering...why hasn't God answered my prayers...disappointment with plans/dreams, etc.

Q: Well, what do we do with this pain? How do I address my suffering/doubt? How do the true citizens of heaven live their lives? What makes Pat Welty different from the world?

A: We must continue looking to Christ!

Notice how Paul pivots/transitions the conversation about their mutual suffering – that is – the suffering that both Paul and the Philippians would surely face in life...and he now encourages them to suffer together in unity!

First, the true citizens of heaven focus on unity (vv 2, 3a).

LESSON: Only thing worse than suffering...is suffering all alone...Paul is pushing the church to embrace churchwide unity!

Phil 2:1, Paul asks:

- Is there any encouragement in being united with Christ?
- Is there any comfort/consolation in love?
- Is there any fellowship with the Holy Spirit?
- Is there any affection and mercy?

Phil 2:2 → Paul, “Then make my joy complete by...”

- Thinking the same way (having the same mind).
- Having the same love...
- United in spirit...
- Intent on one purpose...

Phil 2:3 → Paul goes on:

- Do nothing out of selfish ambition
- Do nothing out of selfish conceit

Paul's major point here is that heavenly citizens – saved people – actively seek unity with other Christians (vv 2-3a).

“Thinking the same way...Having the same love...United in spirit/purpose!”

- Christ brings unity amidst diversity.
- Not uniformity...but unity (there is a difference).

FACT: I am different from you, and you are different from me. But when I'm full of Christ...and you are full of Christ...we complement one another beautifully!

Note:

- The devil hates us!

- If the devil can't hurt us himself, he'll try to get us to hurt each other. (division...disunity...fighting over our preferences...)

Remember I told you a few weeks ago about Paul's heartbeat from Philippians 1 –

- Some preachers supported him.
- Some preachers tried to undermine him.
- Paul didn't care as long as Christ's name was exalted (Phil 1:18).

FACT about FBCW – we are not into competing with other churches, or being compared to other churches, we're really just into celebrating with other churches!

At FBCW – we don't all think the same. We don't all have the same gifts. We don't all have the same preferences.

And when we are surrendered to Christ's Lordship and the Spirit – this is a beautiful, beautiful testimony! Our diversity makes us beautiful...our vast/varying gifts help us achieve the mission sooner!

Here's a question: is the church united? Does the church feel/experience true unity?
Leslie Flynn said it this way:

*Believe as I believe, no more no less
That I'm right and no one else, you must confess
Feel as I feel, think as I think,
Eat as I eat and drink as I drink;
Look as I look, and do as I do,
Then and only then I'll have fellowship with you.*

Now notice how Paul's second point emerges in the text: yes, the Philippians must be united, and they achieve this unity through promoting the interests of others rather than their own interest...

Second, the true citizens of heaven embrace humility (vv 3b, 4). Can you think of stronger language, or a stronger call to selflessness in the Bible?

- Do nothing out of selfish ambition.
- Don't be conceited.

Selfish ambition – nothing wrong with wanting to win...but the problem with many...you're willing to 1) violate Scripture and 2) run over others to get there – and that's not a win!

Selfish ambition – when it's all about you – it's impossible for Christ to get the credit!

Conceit – this word means excessive pride, an abandonment of humility.

- Satan and the Fallen Angels were dismissed from heaven because of pride!
- Serpent tempted Eve in the Garden with pride – “*You will have the knowledge of God...*”

Listen to these words – “Consider others as more important than yourselves...” HOW?

- Put the needs of others before yourself.
- They listen.
- They take responsibility...they don't blame others...
- They think, “How can I contribute?” NOT “What can I receive?”

Humility =

- Giving credit to your Teachers/Teammates...Cleaning the bathrooms at the office.
- Cleaning the coffee pot...or the microwave...Letting someone go ahead of you in line...

ILLUS: I love what Dietrich Bonhoeffer says in “Life Together” – the seven principles for eradicating selfish ambition from Christian communities:

1. Holding your tongue – refusing to speak of another Christian without love/charity.
2. Remembering like Paul this mindset: you are the chief of sinners.
3. You listen to others, “long and patient” – you work diligently to understand your fellow Christian's need (you aren't in a hurry).
4. You don't get irritated by an interruption – you know that your time is the Lord's time, and if an unexpected need comes up in a fellow Christian, you are ok with that.
5. You bear the burdens of others – specifically giving freedom and forgiveness.
6. Willing to speak God's word to fellow believers when they need to hear it.
7. Recognize Christian authority is characterized by service, and you do not call attention to yourself as you serve.

Third, the true citizens of heaven constantly look to the example of Jesus Christ (vv 5-11).

In this beautiful passage (some call it an early Christian hymn), Paul is calling for the church to follow the example of Christ's selflessness, humility, and obedience...

Jesus was God.

But he was not a God that was unwilling to come to you (in your need).

- Jesus = totally holy! But not so holy that He can't be mindful of you.

He willingly stepped away from heaven's glory.

He came to you...because he knew you could never get to him...

For your sake, he became a servant!

He humbled himself.

He sought out the very people that wanted to hurt him.

He was obedient.

He laid down his life by willingly dying the death you deserved on the cross.

As a result!

Though Christ was humble...God has highly exalted Him!

Christ's name is bigger, better, and stronger than any other name!

One day, at his name:

- Every knee will bow!
- Every tongue will confess!
- Jesus Christ is the Lord...to the glory of God the Father!

Paul's point – Jesus is your motivation for humility.

Need help with humility? Look to Christ!

Struggling with pride? Look to Christ!

Big Idea. True citizens of heaven are seeking a unified church, filled with humble members, that follow hard after the example of Jesus Christ!

- Let us minister together (all spiritual gifts welcome) → We are together! We seek unity!
- Let us put the needs/interests of others before ourselves → Mission over preferences!
- May I adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus → do I remind others of Christ?