

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (14-6-1992 Cleland Baptist Church)

Philippians 3:20,21

Additional Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58

Introduction

The third chapter of Philippians has dealt with rejoicing in the Lord, worshipping in the Spirit, and pressing on to lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold of us. These are all things that should be part of the Christian life. Now Paul deals with the eagerly awaited Second Coming.

This is a vast and thrilling, but difficult subject, and we are only going to deal with one aspect of it. Christ's return ought to make the Christian's heart leap with joy. It is the one thing which makes him optimistic and confident about the future. Everything around suggests we ought to be pessimists, like everyone else. The Christian has something glorious to look forward to.

However, note the significance of the context. Immediately before came a solemn warning that some had gone far astray (Philippians 3:17-19), living according to their sensual appetites, proud of things they should be ashamed of, enemies of the Cross of Christ. Their end would be destruction. They were going to perdition. It is from this dark gloomy picture that Paul leaps to this glorious picture of the Christian's future. The present is wonderful, but the future is beyond description.

Our present position

Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). Heaven is our homeland, our true home. It is the place where we belong. This was a very appropriate thing to say to the Philippians. Philippi was a Roman colony in Greece. It was different from many other Greek towns because it was modelled on the great city of Rome. Rome, the centre of the Empire, was hundreds of miles away, but it was the model on which Philippi was built. Old soldiers settled there after 21 years of service. They had many privileges - they wore Roman dress, had Roman laws, Roman morals, Roman tax exemptions, they spoke the Roman language, Latin. So it was different from all the other towns in the country of Greece, a little island, a miniature Rome in Greece.

Just as Rome was the true homeland for these army veterans, and their citizenship was in Rome though they lived elsewhere, so our citizenship is in heaven though we are living on earth. Our names are on heaven's register, the Lamb's Book of Life. We gained this citizenship through our new birth. **God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves** (Colossians 1:13). **God made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus** (Ephesians 2:5,6).

This is our present condition. We are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, to be seated in the heavenly places with Him. This makes us fundamentally different from all around us. We are under new authority, God's authority, alive to God, possessing the very life of God. This shows itself in an entirely different kind of life. We are

governed by God's laws and heaven's standards. Rather than worrying and asking about what the "in thing" is on earth, we should be asking what God's will is. What does His Word teach? Our mind, interests and thoughts should be on heavenly things. Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also – and it will show. Our affections should be above, where Christ is.

We are aliens in this world, strangers and pilgrims. We do not belong. Our life is markedly different from everyone around about. Our standards, speech, interests are all different. Current standards have no weight or influence on us. In practice this is seen in how we spend our money, our moral standards, honesty, truthfulness, use of the TV, the newspapers and magazines we read, our conversation, our home life, treatment of others, attitude to work, how we spend the Lord's Day.

Not that we do not care about this world. But we see it in a different light. We see it from God's angle, we bemoan sin, seek to restrain evil. We submit to the authorities here on earth and live orderly lives.

As Christians, we have different rights and privileges from others. As citizens of heaven we have a right of audience with the King, access to the throne, we can take petitions to Him and make requests of Him. God is especially interested in us. **You only have I chosen** (Amos 3:2); **The very hairs of your head are all numbered** (Matthew 10:30). Nothing can happen to us without the Father's knowledge. He is interested in us in an intimate sense.

We also have a different outlook on the future from those around us. **We eagerly await a Saviour from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ** (Philippians 3:20). *απεκδεχομεθε* implies our minds are set on that, eagerly awaiting, we keep thinking about it. **We long for his appearing** (2 Timothy 4:8) – what a delightful phrase. We are not pinning our hopes on Parliament, or the EEC, or the UNO. We pray for them, wish them well, but we do not believe they will have the full and final solution to this world's needs. Our confidence and expectation is in Christ's return. We are on the lookout for Him, our expectant hearts and hopes are set on that.

If you are a citizen of heaven, do you live like it? Do you enjoy its privileges? Is your eye on the future revelation of Christ?

Future Prospects

We await a "Saviour" from heaven. This is not a common title for Paul to use. He uses "Lord" 239 times, but "Saviour" only 6 times. But it is the most appropriate word here, speaking about the future, when the work of salvation will be completed. So far our salvation has brought us forgiveness, new life, eternal security. But there are more blessings to come. At death, we will be taken out of this world, away from the sphere of sin, and we will lose our evil nature, and be delivered from all trials. We will be at home with the Lord. Then at Christ's return we will receive new bodies, like His glorious resurrection body, and we will dwell in a new heaven and new earth. Then salvation will be complete, when we are forever with the Lord in glory. Not till then will we fully understand what we mean by calling Him "Saviour".

Our present lowly bodies will be changed. On earth, they are weak, prone to sickness, ugly, fragile, diseased, decaying, and they can be the instrument of sin. Above all, they are liable to death, finished after a relatively few years. We run out of spare parts eventually. But our future body will be imperishable. The shame and dishonour will be replaced by glory; the weak will be replaced with the strong; the ugly with the beautiful; the natural will become the spiritual. In our final destination, we will not be disembodied spirits in the Lord's presence, but we will have new, glorious, imperishable and powerful bodies. The prototype and pattern was Christ's resurrection body.

Salvation not only affects our bodies. It brings the splendour of deathless life, complete likeness to Christ, a sinless spirit like His, a perfect body like His. **We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is** (1 John 3:2). **Conformed to the likeness of His Son** (Romans 8:29). **Christ is formed in you** (Galatians 4:19). The completeness and perfection of salvation will be realized. At present, our understanding of salvation is small and cramped.

The sovereign Lord will bring all under His control – all earthly powers, authorities, enemies, powers of evil, death and the devil – all will submit to His lordship. As master of the universe He can create new bodies for His people in which to glorify God in the new heaven and new earth. We can safely leave Him to do what He says He can do. We do not know how, but we know Him, and that is enough. His person, His word and His power are the guarantee of a glorious transformation

Conclusion

This is a wonderful picture and prospect, which puts heart in us. It rebukes our fear and anxiety and uncertainty about the future. It is possible to hold a small coin so close to the eye that we cannot see it. It is easy to be so anxious about the state of the world and our own personal situation that we cannot see God, His glory and purposes for our future. **“Yes, I am coming soon” Amen, come, Lord Jesus** (Revelation 22:20). Come, and bring full and final salvation. Come, that we may be conformed to Your perfect image. Come, that we may be forever happy, strong and free in the marvellous world of the resurrection. Come, that we may see You as You are. Come, that we may meet again other Christians, loved ones who have gone before. Come and display Your glory and power. Take full possession of us and of the world. Come and put down Your enemies, and bring the universe under Your sway. Subdue all things that we may spend endless lives for You and Your glory.