

# PHILIPPIANS

## JOY ON THE JOURNEY

Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Philippians 3.17-4.1  
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### I. Connecting With One Another

Have you ever been in a situation that made you feel like an alien - as though you did not belong? What was that like? What do you imagine becoming a citizen of a different country would be like?

### II. Introduction to this Study

At the heart of Paul's letter to the Philippians is the encouragement to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel... (1.27) This includes developing Christ-like character, holding out the word of life - the gospel, having genuine concern for others and pressing on in the journey of faith, realizing that our sins are forgiven and forgotten by God.

This week we find Paul spelling out the ways in which we are able to stand firm in our faith: following Paul's example, recognizing our true citizenship, and relying upon the One, true Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

### III. Study the Text – Philippians 3.17-4.1

- a. Let's begin with verse 17. After re-reading this verse, look back through chapter 3. In what specific ways has Paul been an example of faithfulness? Why is it important and how is it effectual for you to follow the example of faithful Christians? Who has been this kind of mentor or example to you? To whom are you an example of faithful discipleship?
- b. According to verse 18, why is Paul so adamant about the Philippian Christians following his (and others') examples of faithfulness? Can you relate to Paul's tears for those who now live as "enemies" or "hostile to" the cross of Christ? How can you be an example to those close to you who are indifferent to Jesus?
- c. Paul contrasts those who follow or imitate his example with those who imitate the example of enemies of Christ. Look at verse 19. Notice the four ways they are described. First, their destiny is destruction or spiritual death and separation from God. Second, their god is their stomach or their desires and feelings. Third, their glory is in their shame, in other words they boast and revel in shameful, indecent behavior. And fourth, their minds are on earthly things, not on things having to do with God. How well does this describe elements within our American society?
- d. Before looking at verses 20 and 21 let me remind you that Philippi was a city that was overtaken by the Roman Empire in 160 B.C. In 42 B.C. and following years the city swelled with Roman colonists and eventually its citizens were granted full Roman citizenship (rare for a non-Italian city). However, loyal citizens were compelled to take

an "oath of allegiance" to Caesar Nero whom they considered to be their "Lord and Savior."

With this in mind what significance is there to Paul's assertion that "our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ?"

To what extent is Christian Philippians' faith at odds with the Roman citizenship? In what way are they "resident aliens" that is, residents of the Roman Empire yet having a different citizenship or belonging to a different place of citizenship?

Among the values in American society we find consumerism, self-sufficiency, looking out for number one, increasing disregard for human life, calling evil "good", increasing animosity toward Christianity, and growing disregard for the will of God. How do these cause you to feel that you are a "resident alien" as a Christian in this country?

- e. The Philippians are called to live as citizens of one kingdom (of God) while being in another kingdom (of Rome). But Paul suggests that as they do so there is a reason for sure hope - "we await (or this could be translated "trust in") a Savior from heaven (our true place of citizenship)." What will this Savior do when he appears from heaven?

Why is it important to know that our bodies will be transformed (the Greek word is *metaschematisei* - "meaning with a new schematic or design" or "changed appearance") and be made like Jesus' glorious body (remember he was seen in a body that subsequently ascended into heaven)?

- f. Finally, look at 4.1. How would you describe Paul's heart for the Philippians? What enables them (and you) to stand firm?

#### IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Who are the people that mentor you? Who are the people you mentor? Would you pray to be following the example of faithful Christians and to be an example for others - your spouse, children, grand-children, other believers - to follow?
- b. There may be people close to you who have turned away from Jesus. Would you be willing to faithfully pray for them, asking God to draw them to the love of Jesus Christ?
- c. True Roman citizens made a personal oath of allegiance to Caesar. Americans often recite the pledge of allegiance to our country. What would you include in a pledge of allegiance to Jesus and his Kingdom (our true place of citizenship)? Write out your personal pledge of allegiance to Christ.
- d. Please pray for the victims of Hurricane Sandy, for wise and God-honoring leadership in our governments, and for Good Shepherd as we seek to be faithful as citizens of heaven.

*And to claim that one's citizenship is in heaven is to say that you pledge allegiance not to any of the kingdoms of this world but to Jesus and the body of those who take on his suffering, enemy-loving posture toward the world. This is what Peter meant when he called the church "a holy nation, a people set apart" (1 Peter 2.4-12) a people who are supposed to live as aliens and strangers in this land.*

Shane Claiborne in *Jesus for President*