



Central Peninsula Church

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Philippians 1:27-2:2
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Gospel Citizenship

SERIES: Philippians: A People and A Place Transformed by the Gospel

Jacob was born in 1956. A few years before his birth, Jacob's parents had fled their homeland of Palestine. They fled 120 miles north to Beirut, Lebanon. They established a new life in Lebanon. There, Jacob's father was able to work hard and spend a great deal of money to purchase Lebanese citizenship for his family.

But even though little Jacob grew up with this Lebanese citizenship, because of his Palestinian descent and accent, he was constantly viewed and treated like a second-hand-citizen, which means he was treated as though he wasn't a true citizen of that country. From the time he was a young boy on through his adolescence, Jacob experienced an identity crisis. He wasn't able to identify himself as Palestinian or as Lebanese. This affected everything. Jacob was called names. He was bullied. He was not treated as an equal with the rest of his neighbors. He lacked their freedoms, their opportunities, and their security.

But everything changed for Jacob in 1977. When Jacob was 19 the civil war in Lebanon came to a peak and so Jacob fled Lebanon and came to America on a student visa. A few years later Jacob met an American woman. This woman married Jacob, making Jacob an American citizen.

Long before, Jacob's father had worked hard and spent much money to purchase a secondhand citizenship in Lebanon. But here in America, an American woman simply married Jacob and Jacob was given, for free, a citizenship that transformed his identity and his whole way of life.

Some of you probably know that I'm telling the story of Jacob Habache who sits in the front row here at CPC. I recently had lunch with Jacob and he told me about how in becoming an American citizen, he came to know a sense of belonging that he'd never known before, that he'd been yearning for his whole life. This new citizenship gave Jacob a new identity. It gave him a freedom, equality, security, and sense of opportunity that he'd never had before. This citizenship changed Jacob's life. It changed Jacob. And Jacob's story of transforming citizenship has everything to do with today's passage in Philippians.

This is the fifth sermon in a series on Paul's letter to the Christian community in Philippi. I began

this series in October and if you can remember back that far, this series began with a look at Acts 16 when Paul first came to Philippi, preached the gospel, saw three radically different lives transformed, and with these three changed lives Paul planted the Philippian church. We then looked at how ten years after that first visit to Philippi, Paul wrote this letter to the growing, thriving Philippian church. Paul, remember, began this letter by greeting the Philippians, then praying for the Philippians, and next by reporting to the Philippians that his Roman imprisonment had only served to advance the gospel and solidify his conviction that to live is Christ and to die is gain.

This morning we're picking up our series at a transition point. So far Paul has used this letter to greet, pray, and report. But with today's text, Paul transitions his focus and begins to instruct. Here Paul begins to lay out for the Philippians four chunks of instructional material before resuming his ministry report. And for these next four weeks, we will look at these four chunks of instructional material.

Our first chunk, today's chunk, is Philippians 1:27-2:2. These are six verses that I believe most of us skip right over. Many of you have told me that Philippians is your favorite book of the Bible and you've shared with me the various sections of this book that you hold dear and that you've underlined in your Bibles. But nobody has ever told me that this passage is dear to them. This is an un-underlined passage for most of us. Until recently, this was a passage I pretty much just skipped right over. I wish I hadn't been so foolish. Understanding this passage would've saved me from a lot of humiliation.

How many of you have been humiliated before? Let me tell you about my most humiliating experience. Twelve years ago, when I was 16, I began keeping a journal. And it turns out that now, 12 years later, I have 14 journals. Just a few weeks ago I decided it would be interesting to go back and read through these old journals. So I took an afternoon, began with my first journal entry from when I was a junior in high school, and I read several of these journals, on up through to my junior year of college. And as I read I was completely...humiliated. These old journals show just what a jerk I used to be. I was so humiliated from the

first two of these journals that I actually burned them—nobody could ever benefit from reading what I wrote there. Nobody ever will read what I wrote there. And what humiliated me the most is that here I was, a Christian teenager, and yet I clearly did not understand the gospel. I did not understand what today's six verses are all about: Gospel Citizenship.

I. Gospel Citizenship (1:27a)

Look at verse 27. We're going to work through today's passage phrase by phrase, so beginning with the first half of verse 27, Paul says, "**Only let your manner of life be worthy...**".

This is the first command in Philippians. And it's a big deal that this command begins with the word "only." By using this word to introduce his first command, Paul is saying: "this is the one thing I want you to really get...at all costs, pay attention to this."

And the richness of the command that Paul gives us here, unfortunately does not fully come through in our English translations. We're dealing here with one Greek word that takes many English words to translate. My translation, the ESV, uses six English words to translate this one Greek word. This is the Greek verb *politeusthe*, which comes from the Greek noun *polis*, which means "city." It's from this word that we get our English words "politics" and "police." What Paul is literally saying with this one verb, this one command, is "live as citizens," "live as citizens in a manner worthy of the gospel." Some translations show this in the footnotes.

By using this word "citizens," Paul is being clever. Paul is alluding to and playing upon the prized Roman citizenship that the residents of Philippi enjoyed. Remember, Philippi was not a Roman *province* like much of the world was at that time—a place conquered and oppressed by Rome. No, Philippi was a Roman *colony*—an important city that was viewed as a miniature Rome away from Rome. The population of Philippi was a population of Roman citizens. If you were born in Philippi to Philippian parents, you were freely granted Roman citizenship. Your name was written down on the legal files in Rome and you were issued a certificate of citizenship. And this citizenship gave you unprecedented rights, freedoms, opportunities, and securities in the ancient world.

The other churches that Paul planted—the Corinthians, Thessalonians—these churches didn't have Roman citizenship. Paul knew how much the Philippians loved exercising their citizenship. Paul knew that the Philippians' sense of identity and way of

life was profoundly shaped by their Roman citizenship, just as Jacob Habache's sense of identity and way of life was profoundly shaped by his American citizenship. So what Paul is expressing in this loaded phrase is that the gospel gives you a second and more important citizenship, a citizenship that more radically transforms your identity and way of life. Let me put this in just a few words for us: the gospel gives you Dual Citizenship. If you're a Christian this morning, the gospel has made you a Dual Citizen.

Paul is saying to these Christians in Philippi, "Remember, because of the gospel, you're not only Roman citizens, you're also citizens of heaven." Look at what Paul says a few paragraphs later in Philippians 3:20, "...our citizenship is in heaven..." So in our verse, in this first command, Paul is saying: "exercise this citizenship...exercise this new identity that you've been given...let this new identity continually transform your whole way of life."

The Philippians loved to exercise their *Roman* citizenship. Jacob loves to exercise his *American* citizenship. This is a command for the Philippians and for us to exercise, here on earth, the *Heavenly* citizenship that we have through the gospel.

I want you to know that, per capita, this word "gospel" appears in Philippians more than any other book of the Bible. Nine times in four short chapters, Paul calls his readers back to this word "gospel." That's why this word will show up in my sermon titles for the next four weeks, because I want us to grasp afresh what this six-letter word is all about. I believe that as Christians, we often make the mistake of thinking that the gospel is merely what got us started in the Christian life and that once you've been a Christian for a few months, you move on from this basic message to more mature matters.

But remember who Paul is writing this letter to. Paul's writing this letter to Christians. He's writing a letter to probably his most mature and healthy congregation of Christians, and yet Paul's constantly saturating this little letter with the good news. Christians need to hear the gospel just as much as non-Christians do.

Well, what is the gospel? Martyn Lloyd Jones, the famous Welsh preacher, once said that Scripture gives us about 40 different "gospel nutshells"—about 40 different neat little summaries of the gospel. So there are a lot of different ways I could put the gospel in a nutshell for us, but here's just one nutshell: A *great woman* married *Jacob Habache*, granting Jacob a citizenship that transformed his identity and

his whole way of life. In the same way, on the cross a *great Savior* married *sinners*, granting us an eternal citizenship that has transformed our identity and that is continually transforming our way of life. That's, in a nutshell, the message that we need to keep coming back to every single day of our Christian lives.

I didn't understand this; that's what my old journals showed me. This word "worthy" in verse 27, I thought that now that I was a Christian I had to perform perfectly in order to be worthy of the gospel. But the whole point here is that we're never worthy of the gospel. The point is that the more we understand and exercise this new identity we have through the gospel, the more we're transformed and the more we show off the worth of Christ who has performed perfectly in our place. And the funny thing is that 10, 12 years from now when I read my journals from this year, I'll see that in 2007 I was a jerk and that I didn't really understand the gospel. You do realize don't you, that the same goes for all of you? Like me, 10-12 years from now you'll look back on who you are today and you'll realize that you were a pretty big jerk and that you didn't really grasp how amazing the gospel is.

This text now goes on to show us that with our Gospel Citizenship we receive three gifts. For the rest of our time, we're going to look at these three gifts.

II. Gospel Citizenship Gives You a Community (1:27b, 2:2)

First, Gospel Citizenship gives you a community. Just like any national citizenship, Gospel Citizenship isn't private, it's communal. The word "community" means "with unity." If you have community with a group of people, you have unity with that group of people. And the two verses that sandwich our passage speak all about unity.

Look at the second half of verse 27 and 2:2 with me. **"...of the gospel of Christ, 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 mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,... complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind...."** That's seven references to unity: one spirit, one mind, side by side, same mind, same love, full accord, one mind.

This new citizenship that you're given when you become a Christian now unites you with a new community. When you become a Christian citizen, you're given a family. The gospel gives you new family and new friends. And what's so great is that this new citizenship connects you with people you would've never been in community with before.

Remember the first sermon in this series from Acts 16? Remember how wealthy Lydia (the Hillsborough woman) and the poor slave girl (the one

who sleeps under an overpass) and the blue collar Roman jailer (the guy who lives up in South City), how these three people who would've never been friends before became family, they became the church in Philippi?

That's our church isn't it? Look around you. See how different we are. One of the things I love about CPC is how diverse we are. We reflect, fairly well, the diversity here on the Peninsula. But most of us here wouldn't be friends if it wasn't for the gospel. This dual citizenship we have explains why you can meet a stranger on a plane, find out that stranger is a fellow Christian, and in just 30 minutes of conversation feel closer to that stranger than you do with people in your own family who you've known your whole life.

Everybody wants community. Everybody's searching for it. Everybody here on the Peninsula is building their life around some type of community—whether that's based on status, or skin color, or a common interest, or whatever. Everybody wants a group where they can say, "we're of the same mind, we have the same love, we're of full accord." But it takes a new citizenship, it takes the gospel, to achieve true community.

That's because the gospel teaches us that none of us is better than anyone else. It teaches us that we all stand on equal ground before the cross of Christ. No longer do we try and fabricate community based on personality types or preferences, but now we create community at the foot of the cross. When something other than the gospel becomes ultimate in the church, our community is destroyed. This was obviously an issue in Philippi. Later in this letter, in chapter 4, we'll see how Paul addresses two people in the Philippian church, Euodia and Syntyche, who are not getting along because something other than the gospel began to define their relationship.

So let me ask you, have you let something other than the gospel define how you do community here? Are there people here in this room who you need to reconcile with because you've let personalities, petty divisions, or preferences take the place of the gospel in your relationship? How are you being like Euodia from Philippi? Who's your Syntyche here at CPC?

What Scripture is telling you today is to get over it, repent, and reconcile because your relationship issues pale in comparison to the relationship issues we sinners created between us and God, and God went to astonishing lengths to reestablish community with us. We better cherish and protect this community we've been given. What we're

ultimately doing as a community of Christians here on the Peninsula is reflecting the nature of God. Our God is a community. Our God is Triune: Father, Son, and Spirit in perfect community. And if we're really serious about being a community of heavenly citizens here on the Peninsula, many of us in this room will need to do some reconciling so that we can get on with the business of reflecting our Trinitarian God.

III. Gospel Citizenship Gives You a Mission (1:27b-30)

Gospel Citizenship gives you a community. It also gives you a mission. This dual citizenship we have isn't meant to stay in here, it's meant to go public. It's for the benefit of others.

As Roman citizens, the Philippians participated in civic life. They lived their lives in the public squares and in the market places of Philippi. Remember how Paul first addressed the Philippians in verse 1 of this letter? He addressed them as being both "in Christ" and "at Philippi." That's dual citizenship. This is a citizenship that calls us to be on a mission where we live. Look again at the second half of verse 27. **"...of the gospel of Christ, 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 mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,"**.

What this is saying is that as we go about our public lives here on the Peninsula, we have a mission—we have something that we stand for and strive for. This word "striving" comes from the gladiator arena. The movie *Gladiator* gives us a great illustration of this word when, near the beginning of the movie, Maximus (Russell Crowe) and twenty or so other gladiators have to stand together and fight side by side in order to stay alive. Paul's telling these Christians in Philippi that Christianity is a team sport that calls for a fight.

Guys like me get excited over language like this in the Bible. These are fighting words. This is a masculine passage. I get to fight. But we've got to understand what kind of fight Paul is talking about here. Paul's not telling us to grab our shields and our swords and pick a fight with Foster City. He's telling us to put on a different armor—the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, the sandals of the gospel of peace, and to side by side be on a humble mission of standing and striving for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of seeing more lives transformed by the good news. We're not fighting *against* our neighbors; we're fighting *for* our neighbors, for them to know what we know. Whatever obstacles come our way, Paul says, "stay on mission...stand firm...strive side by side for the sake of this message."

I don't know if our Peninsula has ever seen a community like this on a mission like this. Would you agree that we live in a pretty pagan place where most of

the population rejects Christianity? Well, I think that what our Peninsula is rejecting much of the time isn't the gospel and isn't Christianity, but rather, what's been passed off as the gospel, what's been passed off as Christianity.

When you meet somebody new, after you've found out each other's names, what's the first question you ask each other? "What do you do?" I'm often meeting new people around the Bay Area and I ask them the question and find out that they work as software engineers and make lots of money and have great stock options, and I drool a little bit, and then this new acquaintance asks me the question and I say, "I'm a pastor." And I find that people respond to this in one of three ways. Some people simply say "hmmm"..., they get kind of quiet and stare at me for a few seconds, then they look down at their watch and say they've got to run to a meeting. Other people hear that I'm a pastor and immediately they seem to transform before my eyes. They start to alter their behavior—they drop the cuss words, or set down their beer, or start tucking in their shirt. It's really an awkward moment. And other people, when they hear that I work at a church, they ask, "What kind?" "Which group are you with?" "What denomination?" "There are a lot of different types of Christians aren't there?" I then tell them that I work at a non-denominational church and that we're just a community of people who've been changed by Jesus and who love him. Then they ask me what "non-denominational" means and how that's different from Baptist, Presbyterian, Covenant, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Methodist, or one of the other 100 different denominations they've seen here on the Peninsula. I always get a little sad during those conversations.

Why is this? How do all these people get the idea that being a Christian means being a part of a fragmented, confusing smorgasbord of Christian groups where what you do is clean up your behavior, act a bit more moral, tuck in your shirt, and fight against non-Christians. Where did people get this false perception? If we're all honest here, I think we can say that, in part, they get it from us, from Christians. Whatever you think about that, I think we can at least all agree that most people who live here have not encountered a loving, gospel-centered community of Christians who are on a humble mission to live out heavenly citizenship here on the Peninsula, for the sake of a better Peninsula.

This passage should at least cause us to ask ourselves questions like: What would your neighbors and co-workers say you stand for and strive for? What kind of a mission would the people you rub shoulders

with say you are on? What does Foster City think all of us are up to this morning, here in this building at the corner of Catamaran and Shell? Well, this text tells us that our mission will be most effective, our neighbors will begin to change, when they see how we handle suffering. Look at verses 28-30. **“...and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”**

Did you catch what Paul said about suffering? He says in verse 29 that suffering is a gift—he says it’s been “granted” to the Philippians that they suffer for Christ. How can Paul say this? No other religion says this. Suffering, a gift? How can this be?

Our suffering isn’t so much a gift for *us* as it is a gift for *others*. In verse 28 Paul says our suffering is a “sign” to others of their “destruction.” What this means is that whether you’re suffering as a result of persecution or simply as a result of living in a fallen world, how you handle that suffering sends a message to other people. As a Christian you can handle suffering without fear, as Paul says, because you know where your true citizenship lies.

It’s impressive to look north and take in the towering San Francisco skyline. People come here from all over the world to get a look at that skyline. But as a Christian you’re aware of a far more impressive skyline. You’re a citizen of heaven and the skyline of heaven is dominated by a towering throne. Jesus sits on that throne. No matter how bad things might be down here, no matter how much you might suffer, Jesus is on his throne. The skyline of heaven does not change. And that reality allows you to handle your suffering in a radically different way from anybody else. You see that skyline, you see that throne, you see Jesus, you have citizenship there. That changes how you suffer. That’s a gift to non-Christians because they watch how you handle suffering and it’s a sign to them of their destruction. It’s a sign to them that if they were to go through what you’re going through, they couldn’t do it. They wouldn’t see the throne that you see. They wouldn’t have confidence that citizenship in a better place awaits them.

Are you suffering this morning? There’s a gift in there somewhere. There’s an opportunity to lead others towards the throne of Jesus.

But we can’t do any of this on our own.

IV. Gospel Citizenship Gives You Power (2:1)

Gospel Citizenship doesn’t just give you a community, it doesn’t just give you a mission, it also gives you, and this is my final point, power. You live as a citizen worthy of the gospel of Christ by relying not on your own resources, but on someone else’s resources. We need power if we’re going to obey the command of verse 27.

Chapter 2 verse 1 talks about this power. This verse lists four resources we draw upon, like the four legs of a chair, as we seek to exercise our dual citizenship. These resources each begin with the word “any.” **“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,...”** (2:1).

That’s our power. “Any encouragement in Christ.” You can’t live the Christian life without encouragement. Paul is reminding the Philippians and he’s reminding us that we can draw upon an eternity of encouragement in Christ. No matter how you might be discouraged today, there’s encouragement to be found in Christ. Run to him, look upon him, sit at his feet, and you’ll receive the encouragement that only he can give.

“Any comfort from love.” Do you need comfort this morning? Here’s the ultimate comfort: the Father loves you. If you’re a non-Christian this morning, you too can know this love. All you must do is repent of your sin and place your faith in Jesus Christ and you’ll know a love that is a billion times more comforting than anything else you’ve ever known.

“Any participation in the Spirit.” The Bible tells us that the Spirit of the living God dwells inside of every believer. That’s power. The Holy Spirit is alive inside of you—that’s how you get up in the morning, face your day, and live a life worthy of the gospel.

“Any affection and sympathy.” Do you perhaps feel today like nobody has affection for you? Do you feel like no one understands, like no one has sympathy for what you’re going through? Well, God does! The God of the Universe has placed his affection upon you and he knows everything that’s going on with you. You have all the affection and sympathy you could ever handle.

The gospel has granted us a new citizenship as well as the power to enjoy and exercise this citizenship. Many Christians try and live this new life by their own power. According to my journals, that’s what I used to do. That’s what I still often do. But that’s not the Christian life. Our heavenly citizenship can be lived only through a heavenly power.

If you're a Christian this morning, the gospel has given you this citizenship and given you this power. You are a dual citizen on the Peninsula. All of this has come your way for free. But what was given to you for free cost someone else a great deal. The only one who ever had the right to be called a citizen of heaven came down from heaven. And on a wooden cross, he was stripped of his citizenship, he spilled out his blood, and with that costly currency he purchased for us a citizenship that we can never lose. That's the gospel!

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