

In 2005, writer, thinker, and cultural commentator, David Foster Wallace delivered his famous commencement address to the graduates of Kenyon College. In the opening moments of the speech, he began with the following parable:

**There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way who nods at them and says, "Morning, boys. How's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually, one of them looks over at the other and goes, "What is water?"**

The point of the parable is that the most obvious, important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and talk about. Our life is saturated in a multiplicity of stories, a multiplicity of what we could call the water we swim in. It is these stories and realities that give deep shape to how we live today. At one point, Wallace calls out the "default setting" of our unconscious human mind. Because it is at this default level setting that our lives are constituted and animated continually.

These stories that constitute our daily living run the gamut of capitalists, consumers, creators, individuals, Americans, etc. To be human is to be a storied person; it is to find ourselves swimming in waters, of which we are often unconscious.

At the end of Wallace's speech, he again famously says, "There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship." This is one of the deepest ironies of our American experience. Because for all of the individuality that is preached to us day in and day out. For all of the uniqueness that we believe we hold, we are all swimming in the waters that far too often remain unconscious to us.

And so, here we are in 2020, and we are swimming in the waters of many different stories, all of which are constituting who we are becoming. And the question is not if you are a disciple, the question is to who or what are you a disciple. Because the reality is the calling of the Gospel of Jesus is about a transferring of allegiances. So much of the discipleship process is about becoming more aware of the allegiances of which you were once unaware.

The Gospel of Jesus, the invitation to live into the Kingdom of God, necessitates a response. It necessitates allegiance. Whether you are a first century citizen of Philippi torn between allegiance to Caesar and the Empire, or to the Kingdom of God and King Jesus? Or whether you are a twenty-first century Bay Area resident that is torn between the allegiances of money, sex, power, or whatever it may be for you. Either

way, the Gospel of King Jesus demands a response of, "Who am I going to follow?"

The New Testament Greek word for faith is the word, *pistis*. This word is the cognate for the word believing, *pisteuo*. What this means is that the word for faith and the word for believing belong together; they are two sides of the same coin. Together, they create a sense that the word denotes faithfulness, both action, belief, and faith. Or as New Testament Theologian, Scot McKnight, defines the word, "trust over time." Or even better yet, Matthew Bates defines the word as allegiance. And it is this concept of allegiance to which the Gospel will demand a response.

The text we will look at this morning is going to do two things for us. First, it is going to bring us face to face with our various allegiances. It will describe a tale of one type of "colony" that is available to live in. And second, the text is going to call us to action, to live into our allegiance to the Kingdom of God. In Philippians 3, Paul is going to necessitate a response; he is going to challenge our allegiances and force us to consider where our utmost allegiance is held.

Let's pick up in Phil. 3:17. "*Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do*" (Phil. 3:17). What a bold statement by Paul? In another place, Paul says, "*Follow me as I follow Christ*" (1 Cor. 11:1). It is a statement of confidence and leadership.

But it should not be understood as one who is claiming that the readers should follow him before Jesus, but rather, he is so connected with Jesus that in following Paul, one actually finds Jesus along the way.

So how can Paul make this statement? Well, if it comes right off the heels of Paul writing his autobiography in the previous verses in this chapter. It is an impressive resume. Paul achieved seemingly every success the world had to offer. He achieved all the success one could imagine.

**Circumcised on the eighth day**

**Of the people of Israel**

**Of the Tribe of Benjamin**

**A Hebrew of Hebrews**

**In regard to the Law a Pharisee**

**As for zeal, persecuting the church**

**As for righteousness based on the law, faultless.**

For Paul, he had attained everything he could have imagined and yet at the end of that impressive list, he says,

**“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ.” Philippians 3:7-8**

This is the posture of Paul, and this is why he has the audacity to say, “Join together in following my example.” And so, after all of that, he says, “Now you do the same. Follow me!” Because at the core of this tension between allegiances, Paul is saying, I’ve had it all, I’ve attained the highest levels of life, and in comparison, for knowing Christ, it is all garbage.

The language Paul uses at the end of his autobiography is the language of death and resurrection. It is a strong immersive language that requires a full commitment.

**“I want to know Christ - yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead” vv. 10-11.**

Paul is calling us, calling his readers, to follow the example he set by dying to himself and step into the allegiance of following King Jesus. And, of course, the example set is to follow Jesus.

*“Keep your eyes on those who live as we do.”* The emphasis of Paul here is that for the apprentice to actually internalize the teachings past down to the student, they must recognize that the ones who actually live out the words are those who should be modeled. It is those who actually put the teachings and life of Jesus into practice and who have actually arrived at some level of transformation.

*“For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil. 3:18).* Philippi was at the crossroads of a few major trade routes. And so, there were often various teachers coming and going, and Paul, filled with pastoral concern, warns his readers to ensure that they are looking at their manner of life as a guide to discerning if they are true followers.

Paul is explicitly blunt here. There will be people who are considered enemies of the cross. They will pass through Philippi, and they will pass through the Bay Area. It is those who are flat opposed to the way of Jesus, who will not find Jesus as the King, as the Lord. They will be hostile to the message that the crucified Jesus is the risen Lord of the world and sits in authority over the world. They will refuse to believe that Jesus is higher than all the Lords of the world.

The reality is the Gospel disrupts the ways of life for all of us. It is not a popular message. We like to sanitize the message, but it is one of disruption. It is a message that demands disruption. It necessitates that our lives become transformed and flipped upside down to the reality of life. The Gospel is a disruption, a holy disruption that reminds us that the Kingdom of God, which is intimately present and available to us all, is reality, and everything else is a parody.

Paul warns, “Watch out for the enemies of the cross.” And then he goes on to lay out four markers of the enemies of the cross. *“Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach and their glory is their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things” (Phil. 3:19).* “Their destiny is destruction...” The word used here for destiny is the word *telos*, which is where we get our word teleology meaning end goal.

It is the word Paul uses back in verse 12, where he talks about arriving at his end goal, which is the resurrection. Here Paul is contrasting his *telos* - resurrection, with the *telos* of the enemies of the cross - destruction. There is coming a day when they will be destroyed, where they will be wiped out of the story.

“...their god is their stomach.” Meaning, the organizing principle of their life is their stomach. What they worship, what they come under the authority of, is their stomach. This is an interesting phrase that we need to parse out a bit more. The stomach is a euphemism for bodily appetites, in particular for food, drink, and sex drive. Paul says that what drives them, what animates them, and what they live out of is a deep drive to fulfill these urges. The abuse of food, drink, and sex, all of these that stake such a high place in our society are area markers of the enemies of the cross. It is their god; it is what they come under the authority of.

“...and their glory is in their shame.” It is one thing to sin with your stomach, but it is a whole other thing to glory in that shame. This is a fairly cryptic phrase, according to most scholars, but it has to deal with the celebration of their misdirected living. It is a whole other level to brag and boast about your sin.

“Their mind is set on earthly things.” Remember, there are two realms available, two kingdoms set out for all people - that of the earthly or that of the heavenly, which are not locations but realms, and their minds are fixed on the earthly. Notice that it is not merely that they are thinking about these earthly things, but “their minds are set on earthly things.” These earthly things are what Paul has already mentioned. It is the fixation of the bodily desire. This is their focus. Rather than being consumed with and under the authority of Christ, they are consumed with their bodily/stomach desires.

Who are these “enemies of the cross?” Scholars actually don’t know fully. Some believe the Epicureans; others think it could be the Judaizers. The point isn’t who exactly Paul had in mind; it is don’t follow people like that. Follow the example of Paul being consumed with Christ.

Now, Paul is going to make a shift. Up until this point, Paul has been fixed on the dimension of the earthly. He has been describing the one who is making their citizenship in the kingdom of the world. But Paul is going to shift and begin to talk about that which defines the Kingdom of God.

*“But our citizenship is in heaven...” (Phil. 3:20a).* At the risk of succumbing to preacher’s hyperbole, I want to suggest that this verse is at the top of the list of verses that are misunderstood and wrongly interpreted. In fact, I want to suggest that it means the exact opposite of how the majority of people understand of this text.

The word Paul uses here for citizenship is the Greek word, politeuma. You may be able to pick up a similar word in English at the front end of that word, politics. The root word literally means, constitution, system of government, right of citizenship, act of administration, and resident community of foreign nationals. It can also be translated, with a nuance that I believe Paul was intentionally drawing, "We are a colony of heaven."

Now, why would Paul be intentionally drawing on this imagery of a colony? Well, keep in mind that Philippi was a colony of Rome. If we are to understand what Paul actually means when Paul says that we are a "colony of heaven," we have to understand how a colony works.

Rome was not the first nation to conquer the world; it had been done by the Egyptians, Syrians, Babylonians, and the Greeks. What made Rome special was that it kept the world conquered for more than a few years. The genius of the Roman Empire was its interconnected sets of colonies that maintained the Roman rule. And the colonies were not just cities planted by the empire but actually functioned as a microcosm of Rome on foreign soil. Meaning, by law, when you were in a Roman colony, you were on Roman soil. You had the possibility of becoming a citizen and therefore, would have all the rights of Roman citizenship. You were exempt from heavy taxes. You were treated well, way better than the other defeated lands.

But here is the important part. The job of a Roman colony was to bring the rule, reign, and the culture of Rome to that city and the region around the city. To bring their rule to the city, culture, food, justice, and law. And to bring their art, architecture, dress, music, language, philosophy, religion, and spirituality.

Put more simply, the task of a colony was to Romanize the city it resided in and the region around the city they found themselves in. Now the colonies, specifically Philippi, was populated by Roman citizens, more particularly, ex-Roman military. Setup as a colony in 42 BC by Marc-Anthony and Octavian, who later became Augustus Caesar (ruler of an empire, inventor of a salad). So when they conquered Philippi, they were left with thousands of soldiers. Rather than shipping all of them back to Rome, they handed out free land to them in Philippi and made it a colony. This way, there were thousands of Romans who were loyal to the empire filling the city.

That means, when Paul said, "Our citizenship is in heaven," he was saying it to a crew of veterans, Roman nationalists. He looked these patriots in the eyes and said that their primary allegiance was not to Rome, but to Heaven. Their citizenship was predominately to the way and Gospel of Jesus. This was a challenging decisive moment that Paul laid on the Philippians.

Here's the really important part, he is NOT saying you belong to another world, and one day you go there when you die. You are just passing through. Baked into that logic is the implication of disengaging and bury yourself away from culture until some glad morning when you fly away. He is not saying to bury yourself in some sort of Christian subculture. This is not what Paul intends, because this is not at all what a colony

does. This is not what Paul is saying, because that is not the story of the scriptures.

If you were a Roman in Philippi, your hope was never to go to Rome, your honor and duty as a Roman was to bring Rome to Philippi! This was your calling. If someone in Philippi said, "We are citizens of Rome," it certainly wouldn't have meant, "So we're looking forward to the day we get to go live there."

Paul is saying, in the same way that the Philippians were to Romanize Philippi, we are called to bring Heaven to the Bay Area. We are called to bring Heaven's culture, rule, and way of life to our area. We are to Heavenize the Bay Area. The task of the Roman Citizen in a colony like Philippi was to bring Roman culture and rule to their city and the surrounding area, to expand the Roman influence there.

Remember, the word Heaven to Paul is not the place where people go when they die, but rather to Paul, Heaven meant "God's space." It is the God dimension of reality; it is the place where things are as they should be.

To Paul, there is a day in the future in which Heaven and Earth are reunited. The Bible ends with the reunification of Heaven and Earth. Revelation 21 and 22 share that this is the trajectory of the story of the scriptures, and that story begins right here and right now, on this earth! In the same way that Philippian citizens were to Romanize Philippi; we are to Heavenize the Bay Area.

And in the meantime, you are called to Heavenize this place. You are enlisted to work toward bringing about Heaven's reign, justice, art, culture, and way of living. It is an active waiting, not a passive waiting. Jesus has declared the Kingdom of God has begun, and it is for us to enter into now. Whether it is Foster City, San Mateo, Burlingame, San Carlos, San Bruno, Mountain View, Palo Alto, Atherton, or Hillsborough, wherever it is, you are called to be about the work of Heavenizing those places, because God has invited you to participate in his story of the reconciliation of all things. And that work begins now because you are a citizen of Heaven; we are a colony of Heaven.

*"And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20b).* Now, it should be noted that Caesar in the first century was referred to with the same title as Jesus - Lord or kurios in Greek. And for the colony, if there was an uprising or attack that threatened the colony beyond what the people of Philippi could handle, their hope was in the arrival of their kurios, their Lord, Caesar, who was the ruler of the whole world.

The same word is used here to talk about Jesus, "The Lord Jesus Christ." This was not a cliché in Paul's day but was used as a subversive political statement that Caesar was not the one actually in charge. Jesus is in charge. Paul's use of this title for Jesus, rather than of Caesar, would have sent shivers down the spines of the ex-military that inhabited Philippi. It was a statement that could have been classified as treasonous. These are dangerous words Paul is using.

As our responsibility is to carry out the work of Heavenizing the Bay Area, we grow weak and frail at that task. We can do something, but

ultimately, we will fall short of that calling, and so Paul says, "We eagerly await a Savior from there." He is going to transform the entire world so that it is full of the life of Heaven. God is going to complete the work that we couldn't complete.

Paul is declaring that the true Savior and the true Lord is not Caesar, it is not Rome, but rather Jesus is the one who will set the world to rights and will be the true Savior that we need to fix this world. And it is for that day we eagerly wait for "a savior from there."

Please take note of the direction. The Savior is coming "from there." Jesus is coming from Heaven to earth. From the God dimension of reality, to the broken place we see as our home. The Bible does not end with a vision of us leaving earth to go to Heaven, but it ends with a vision of Heaven coming to earth.

*"who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."* (Phil. 3:21). There is coming a day when that Savior will return, and then Paul notes two things will take place. First, he will bring "everything under his control." Every single corner of the earth, absolutely everything, will be brought under his control. Everything will be brought into the Kingdom of God. There will be no more death, sickness, brokenness, hurt, pain, cancer, anxiety, or depression. No more!

Second, He will "transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." The word for 'lowly body' is literally translated as "body of humiliation." It denotes a vision of leading someone to lament for the littleness and weakness of the body. It isn't a pejorative, but rather is a statement of fact. Our bodies are failing, they are weak and frail, but one day they will be restored. It is our condition currently under the brokenness of our bodies, and we are in need of transformation.

What does Paul mean by "his glorious body?" Well, look at what we see about Jesus in his resurrected state. We see things that are similar and dissimilar. We see continuity and discontinuity between the body we have now and that which is to come. First, there is a body. Our future is not a disembodied reality, but rather a transformed body reality. After Jesus was resurrected, he eats breakfast, he walks, and he allows Thomas to touch his hands. It is, in some ways, similar to our body. Jesus is in a body, not some sort of Spirit thing. But he, at times, appears and disappears. Which means there is a different and new mode of physicality. Resurrection is not merely resuscitation, but rather it is something different.

*"Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!"* (Phil. 4:1). Finally, Paul concludes this section by saying, "therefore!" In light of all that I have just said, in light of the reality that there is coming a day when

God will fully establish the Kingdom of God on Earth. In light of the reality that you will one day be transformed into the glorious resurrection body that will live on into eternity with the world set to rights by our Lord and Savior, because of that, stand firm!

## **The Aim of our Allegiance**

This is by far the most difficult challenge that Paul gives to the Philippians. And I think the challenge carries over to us. Because, fundamentally, it reshapes how we think of faith. Paul's assertion is not simply that we "stand firm," meaning stay constant in our faith, but rather he means we are to "give our allegiance to Jesus, rather than to Caesar." This Caesar could be any number of things. So, I think it means two things.

1. How do we live as a colony of Heaven? What does it look like to 'Heavenize' your sphere of influence? How has God called you and empowered you to bring about Heaven's culture of justice, righteousness, love, care, compassion, and hope to your spaces?

2. Where is your allegiance? To live as a citizen of Heaven necessitates utmost allegiance to Jesus above all. It means that Caesar is not Lord, it means that your primary allegiance is not to country, political party, or other. Your allegiance is to King Jesus to rule in every area of your life.

May we learn to live as citizens of Heaven; not a Heaven that is distant and removed, but a Heaven that is breaking into this world, here-and-now. May we, as a community, function as a colony of Heaven, an outpost for Heaven, seeking to bring about the culture of Heaven in the Bay Area.

Prayerfully engage the Holy Spirit and listen to how God may be leading you to bring some change. Reflection Question: What would it mean for our community to really live as a colony of Heaven? What would it look like for you to live as a citizen of Heaven?

**Our Father in Heaven,  
Hallowed be your name,  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done,  
On earth, as it is in Heaven."**

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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