

Lent 2—C
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Our Homeland Is Heaven

How many of you saw the movie “E.T.?” Do you remember what that cute little creature E.T. was? He was an Extra Terrestrial—an alien to this planet, a stranger who was just passing through. His real home was in another world. Many people used to watch a couple of TV shows a few years back with make believe characters a lot like E.T. One of those shows was called “My Favorite Martian” and the other was called “Mork and Mindy.” Both of those shows were about aliens—one was a cute little old man from Mars who had two antennae that grew out of his head, and the other was a silly guy from the planet Ork who had a girlfriend here named Mindy. Both of those make-believe characters were just passing through. Their real home was in another world. I don’t see anyone here today who looks like E.T., or a Martian, or Mork from Ork. That’s make-believe.

But there is something about each of us that isn’t at all make-believe. The Bible tells us that we are aliens and strangers in this world. The Bible tells us that this little piece of real estate we call the planet Earth is not the be-all and end-all of our lives. Yes, this is the only piece of real estate we’ve ever known. We were born here; we go to school here, we work here, we raise our families here; and we have put down our roots here. But the Bible tells each of us who are the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ—the adopted sons and daughters of the almighty and eternal God—that we are just passing through. This home is not home. Our homeland is heaven. That’s what the Word of God teaches us today. And the Apostle Paul is going to show us what that means for now and forever.

I. That’s encouragement for a meaningful present

What is life really all about? Paul gave us the answer to that very important question with just five words: “*our citizenship is in heaven*” (20). Anyone who doesn’t know or doesn’t believe that is a person who will not know what life is all about here either. The Apostle Paul knew people like that and the thought of what those people were doing to themselves almost broke Paul’s heart. That is why with his great tenderness and concern which he always had for the human soul, Paul sent this warning to his beloved Philippian Christians: “*To be sure, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. I told you about them often, and now I am saying it while weeping*” (18). That’s what Paul calls someone who doesn’t know or doesn’t believe or who has forgotten that heaven is his or her homeland. Paul doesn’t mince words, does he?

Paul gives a pretty blunt description of one of these enemies of the cross of Christ. He says: “*Their god is their appetite*” (19). The King James translation is even more descriptive. It says: “*Their god is their belly.*” That word appetite or belly is used to picture people who give first place in their hearts to anything in this world they can enjoy or see or taste or feel or touch. Maybe they had big bellies; maybe they didn’t, but those bellies came first. “I am the most important person in my life” was their philosophy of life as they gave in to every sinful desire and every sinful appetite of their sinful flesh.

Paul also added this thought about anyone who forgets heaven is their homeland: “*Their glory is in their shame*” (19). What that means is people will try to convince themselves that they are happy in the life they are living, even to the point of defending, and yes, bragging about their sinfulness. And the very things they thought they wanted most out of life will turn out to one day

be the things that will make them hang their heads in shame. They have life all backwards. It's as if somebody had sneaked behind the department store window in the middle of the night and switched all the price tags around, so that now all the really valuable things had cheap price tags on them and all the junk had become expensive.

This is Paul's inspired diagnosis of what was wrong: "*They are thinking only about earthly things*" (19). No heaven in the heart and so no heavenly-mindedness in their lives—just living as though they belonged here and weren't ever going to leave and all that matters is the here and now and what it could get them. Ultimately Paul says, when it's all over, when you add it all up, with this philosophy of life, there can be only one end to it: "*Their end is destruction*" (19)—an end forever separated from the Lord and forever destroyed by the fires of hell.

We all need this tear-filled warning of the Apostle Paul even more so today than those Philippian Christians needed it back in the year 60 A.D. In the times in which we live, it's not difficult at all for any of us to blame one of those enemies of the cross of Christ. All that we have to do is forget where our real home is. The temptations to do just that are around us every day we are alive. How real the temptation is for each of us to be world-oriented, to tie ourselves down to this planet as though we won't ever have to leave it and to let our possessions possess us rather than us possessing them. How real the temptation is for each of us to live just for ourselves, to make our appetites our gods, and to set our minds on earthly things even though the Bible says: "*We brought nothing into this world and it is certain that we can carry nothing out*" (1 Timothy 6:7). How real the temptation is for each of us to want to do what everybody else around us is doing even if God doesn't approve, and then even try to defend our sinful behavior instead of being ashamed of it. Oh, how we need Paul's reminder of what will happen to the person with this philosophy of life. "*Their end is destruction.*"

Followers of Jesus Christ, our outlook on life has to reach beyond just the horizon of this world. Let me tell you a little story about a group of Christians who were traveling in the Middle East. The Christians had heard about a very wise and devout old believer living there and they went out of their way to look him up. When they finally found the old fellow, they were shocked at how few possessions he had. He lived in a hut that contained only a cot, one wooden chair and table, an old stove for cooking and heating. One of the travelers blurted out: "Where's all your furniture?" The aged saint replied by gently asking a question of his own: "Where is your furniture?" The visitor said: "Why at home, of course. I don't carry it with me. I'm traveling." "So am I," the old Christian replied, "so am I." Our Lord Jesus hasn't commanded any of us to live in huts with no furniture, but our Lord Jesus does want us to remember what that elderly Christian never forgot. We are not permanent residents of this planet. We are only passing through this sinful world. We are traveling on a journey to a better land.

Paul said: "*Our citizenship is in heaven*" (20). As sinners, not a one of us deserves citizenship papers for such a country. But God in his grace has written our names in heaven's book of life. God wrote those names there because of his dear Son and our great Savior, Jesus Christ. If God has included us in his plans, what about us including him in ours? How does he fit into our plans with the goals we set for our lives? How does he fit into our plans with the decisions and choices we make? How does he fit into our plans with the careers we pursue, the lifestyles we live, the friends we hang around with, the priorities we set for our lives and our families? As we make this journey to a better land, are we traveling light? Or are we maybe burdening ourselves with too many things of this world? The more of heaven there is in our lives right now, the less of this earth we covet. Live as citizens of heaven right now, today.

“*Our citizenship is in heaven.*” That is what makes life more than just some mad scramble to pile up a few cheap toys and to have a few cheap thrills. “*Our citizenship is in heaven.*” That means I am not the most important person in my life. That means you are not the most important person in your life. Jesus is! That’s when life really becomes something special as we live it with our eyes on him, our feet following in his footsteps, and our days, weeks, and years devoted to serving him. That’s a life which has some real meaning to it.

II. That’s the promise of a glorified future

“*Our citizenship is in heaven.*” Encouragement for a meaningful present, yes, but the bottom line of the Christian faith is: “What good will it do me when I die?” Here is the greatest thing about belonging to Jesus. The greatest thing about belonging to Jesus is what we believe is still coming. Because our citizenship is in heaven, we have the promise of a glorified future.

The why and the wherefore of it all is right here: “*We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ*” (20). His homeland is in heaven, too. There was a time in the history of this planet when he chose to live as an alien and stranger in our world. When he did that, it was not with a brilliant display of the power he always possessed. As one of Martin Luther’s hymns puts it: “No garb of pomp and pow’r he wore; A servant’s form like mine he bore (CW 377:6). For a third of a century, Jesus walked and talked with us. He laid aside any thoughts of the glorified body that could have been his. He wore instead a lowly inglorious body like ours. Willingly, he dressed himself in the kind of human frame we have and willingly, he took on his body all the grief that is ours because we are sinners—bodies that are weak, that need to be fed, that get worn out, tired, and sick. As his final act of bending down to be like us, in his lowly body, he died. But when Jesus died, he left something behind—our sins. They stayed nailed to the cross and will never be held against us. When he came out of the grave alive on the third day, his lowly body was now a glorified body. With his glorified body, Jesus went back to his homeland, but before he went, he left us a promise: “I go to my homeland to prepare a place for you so that one day you can call it your homeland too. I will come a second time from my homeland to this planet to get you, so that where I am, there you also may be.”

That’s the promise of a glorified future that Paul is telling you and me about when he wrote to the Philippians: “*We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there.*” How we can “*eagerly wait?*” Jesus is coming back as our rescuer and our friend. This time he will put his divine power on display. When he brings his power along, he will do something fabulous for us. It says: “*We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. By the power that enables him to subject all things to himself, he will transform our humble bodies to be like his glorious body*” (20-21). Even if nobody can find our body or nobody knows where our body is; even if our body has been lost at sea; even if our body has been disfigured beyond recognition by disease or fire or accident; even if our body has been buried for a thousand years, Jesus Christ will find it. Jesus Christ will raise it. Jesus Christ will remake it. Our new bodies will be carbon copies of his glorious body. Never again will those bodies be ravaged by sickness. Never again will our bodies be mangled by accident or injury. Never again will our nerve endings send the message of pain to our brains. Never again will our tear ducts go into operation. Never again will this frame of ours ride in a funeral hearse. And never again will we have to say our sad good-byes to those we love in Christ Jesus. With him and with them we will live together forever. That is the promise of a glorified future.

In the book of Ecclesiastes it says: “*God has set our eternity in our hearts*” (3:11). Every Christian has this promise of a glorified future here. You say this world isn’t all it’s cracked up to be? You’re right. You say there’s got to be more to life than this? You’re right. You say you have this yearning inside to live someplace else where all the things that go wrong on this planet won’t ever go wrong again? You’re right. Fellow Christians, our homeland is in heaven. Amen.

Hymns: 355, 214, 417, 213

Body and Soul Salvation

Salvation is body and soul! Let me say that again; salvation in Jesus is body and soul for an eternal citizenship in heaven. And that's good because the problems that all of us face are body and soul.

It's a bit like saying that all of us live Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde type lives due to our sin. Have you ever read the classic book Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? In this short novel by Robert Louis Stevenson, Dr. Jekyll is an intelligent and well-respected scientist. He has inherited great wealth. To all perceptions, he is a gentleman. He is socially aware and elite. His friends enjoy him and he is a well-respected member of society.

But Dr. Jekyll has a secret. He is pretending. When he is alone, he knows that it's all an act. As a matter of fact, Dr. Jekyll knows that his real personality contained a suppressed evil lurking just below the surface.

One day, using his great intellect and scientific skill, Dr. Jekyll figures out a way to give voice and personality to his evil inclinations. As a matter of fact, he has figured out a way to be an entirely evil person while maintaining the public perception that he is good. He combines chemicals in such a way that he is able to transform himself into a different person. Mr. Hyde.

Now Mr. Hyde is pure evil. There is no goodness in him, and no pretense of goodness. Mr. Hyde doesn't officially exist, so he is free to live out his evil inclinations without any fear of repercussion or punishment. He is able to live out his evil without any pretense of even wanting to be good.

The compulsions of our bodies, the temptations of our souls, they have ramifications. They have results. And the problems that we face in our bodies are often problems of our souls just working their way out. And like Dr. Jekyll, there is a Mr. Hyde in all of us due to our sin.

When Paul writes this letter to the believers in the ancient city of Philippi, he's warning them of missing the point, of thinking that a person can live life totally on their terms without ramifications. He says that there are people actually living, not merely as people ignorant of God's body/soul salvation in Jesus, but as enemies of Christ.

He describes such a life in a very graphic way. In the text, he says, there are people who live, by the worship of their own bodies. They worship their own stomachs. They glory in shameful things, and in the end, their destiny is destruction.

When Paul wrote this, it was common to see the stomach as the source of emotions instead of the heart. We still talk this way at times too. Ruled only by what we think is right, by what we feel is good, no matter what God says. That's what it means to be "one who worships their own body" as if that is what life is all about.

But Paul warns all of us who live this way; who live our lives defined by our own feelings and desires alone. He says if you live that way, then you are living as if you are god. And that is an empty reality, a sinful temptation. It is a soul problem that has body ramifications. Such worship allows a person to actually glory, take pride in things that are shameful. But in the end, there is only destruction, because the wages of sin is not salvation, it is death itself.

And, I want to tell you, that these words of Paul hit a little too close to home for all of us. We might not actually worship our bellies. But there is plenty of evidence that we too are quite self-centered. Whether it be that we actually focus too much on our bodies, obsessed with being healthy in this world, or whether we disregard our bodies and just do as we feel for the moment. And what about that general feeling that we have "deep inside" that our wants, our needs, our desires are the most important things in our lives, even for our lives.

And if we are willing to be honest with ourselves, we'd have to admit it - to ourselves or to others, that we often glory in shameful things. We secretly enjoy things that others would look down upon. We secretly crave things that even would label as bad or shameful. We too have become so callous to sin and evil that we no longer feel shame when we sin. Let me say this to you, especially if you are listening to this program for the first time; to be a Christian is to first and foremost admit that you are 100 percent sinner before the righteousness of God. To be a Christian is not, and has never been, a "holier than thou" type of life. Even striving to do the right thing, we know that only the forgiveness, grace, and righteousness of Jesus for us will matter in the end.

Paul reminds all who believe that: "Our citizenship is in heaven. We await a Savior, the Lord Jesus from there, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."

But Paul's early warning stands. Paul is saying if you live glorying in yourself, eventually the Mr. Hyde will win out and that is not a good thing.

If you remember again in the novel, Dr. Jekyll thought he had it all figured out; just be someone else to fulfill those desires. Live one way on Sunday, another on Monday through Friday, or live one way Friday night, Saturday night, and then another on Monday morning.

Such a way of life, won't work, it never does. In the novel, a major problem arose. You see, when the whole experiment started, Dr. Jekyll was in control. He could take the chemical mixture to become Mr. Hyde for a time. But one day, Dr. Jekyll went to sleep and Mr. Hyde woke up on his own. Jekyll hadn't taken the chemical mixture. Mr. Hyde, unexpectedly, unwelcomed, he simply showed up. The evil took over the good.

Jekyll wrote a letter to his friend begging for his help. He admitted in the letter that he thought he had it all worked out. He thought he could determine when Mr. Hyde would appear. But now it is obvious that Mr. Hyde, his evil, was his true nature. And without outside help, Dr. Jekyll would never appear again!

If that isn't a story for today, I don't know what is. If that isn't a metaphor for life that we see all around us today, then we aren't looking. The Apostle gets right to the point in another part of the Bible and says, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7)

And then he says something incredible; thanks be to God who has given us the victory in Jesus Christ. There is a body/soul salvation for the sinful Jekyll and Hyde people that we are and incredibly the message is that God Himself became flesh so that we might be saved body and soul. Body and soul God took upon Himself, the body of a human being, so that there might be salvation for sinful human beings, body and soul.

God took on a body to save everybody from the sin that brought death and destruction to our bodies eternally. God Himself, who took on flesh, did it to fight the battles that were destined to crush us, so that we might again live; not as selfish, self-centered, sinful people, but as God's forgiven, blessed people in His Name!

I know that this is a tough thing to get our minds around. And let me say, I'm not going to explain it as much as I'm going to proclaim it, because it will blow your minds to think that the God of the universe would make Himself so vulnerable to save people who don't deserve it.

What if Christmas, the Bible's version, was really true? What if God did take on flesh to save? The Bible is clear about how miraculous this is. It teaches that God is there before creation. God is there before there are bodies to have. So, whatever the Bible is talking about, it is something bigger than merely religion. It is something so unique, so unimaginable, that there's nothing else like it in the world. In fact, the proclamation that the eternal God became man in Jesus so that

sinful, temporal people might actually live eternal lives again in Him; it's so amazing that all a person can do is be amazed and say "Thank you."

And let me be even more clear; even if we could imagine such a thing, the idea of God becoming man for our salvation, we would still get it wrong when comes to who this Jesus was to be and what He was to do. There are all kinds of stories in the annals of human history of people who might be "super-human, semi-divine." Think about the bodies they had. Again, they're strong, they're perfect, they don't face trial or temptation; no, they are invulnerable. Sounds like self-worship all over again.

The Bible proclaims that when God became flesh, He was vulnerable. He wasn't born into royalty; He was born in a stable to poor parents. He wasn't born to avoid struggle and temptation, He was born to face it and overcome it. He wasn't born to make sinners his slaves; He was born to become a servant so that we sinners could be saved. He was even willing to let His body be in want, in need, to even suffer at the hands of sinful people. The cross of Jesus was His utter willingness to be a nothing because of the sins of the world, so that nobodies like us could be somebodies again, not just for today, but forever with God.

What I love about this good news is that it isn't just for me, and just for you; it's for all people who see their need and see salvation that only Jesus Christ can bring. In fact, it's the other "Body of Christ" that's so important to us as believers. The Bible calls the church, all those who believe in Jesus as their Savior, it calls them the Body of Christ. Again, I think for good reason. It's God's way of saying this is going to be real, flesh-level stuff, transformed not by your efforts or your desires, but by His gift of salvation for you.

The church is the place where we can begin to practice like it's already true. Paul even says, "If you want a picture of what I mean, just think of it this way, 'because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we are citizens of heaven. We don't live for ourselves. We don't worship our bellies. We don't glory in shame.'" In fact, we begin right now, to live our lives, to strive for excellence, not just for excellence sake, but to give God glory and to serve our neighbor in His Name because He has saved us body and soul forever!

With that blessing you can attack the problems of your marriage and know that God's love in Christ will hold you and the ones that are dear to you when it seems that you can't hold anymore.

With that body/soul salvation as a gift from God, you can battle your temptations; you can face your trials and struggles as one whose victory is already sure in Jesus.

With a mindset that is not Jekyll and Hyde, but Christ and me, you can begin to see your real destiny as one of being a child of His, a follower of His, a member of a community of forgiven sinners that will last forever. Paul calls us "citizens of heaven," because he wants us to see what is at stake, but also what is real for all who put their trust in Jesus.

My dear friends, your destiny is not destruction; because you have a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection mean that your sins are forgiven. All who believe in Him are citizens of heaven.

And you might be saying, "Pastor, this sounds way too good to be true. I mean, look at what the world is really like; look at what my life is really like. Can this be true for me, body and soul?"

Well, all I can say is that I know what the world is like. I know what we are like, what you and I are like. And hear this very clearly, The Bible is the most realistic, body/soul book you can read. It pulls no punches. It calls us what we are, 100 percent sinners who need 100 percent salvation from a God who was willing to take on flesh and give us His earned righteousness as a gift, as a cover of grace that lasts forever. Keep that squarely in your hearts, your stomachs, your

minds when you face Mr. Hyde, that inner sinful reality still each day. And continue to battle temptation to sin, though you might still give in too frequently. We still glory too much in shameful things but there is repentance and forgiveness still for you because Jesus is our Savior, body and soul.

Dr. Jekyll realized that giving evil free reign doesn't allow for goodness. Instead, the evil took over and he couldn't control it anymore. He needed someone to deliver him from his evil. He was so consumed with the sin in his life that he needed someone else to save him.

Paul says that we have a "Body and Soul" Savior for Jekyll and Hyde sinners. And, not only that, our salvation is not merely for us personally, it's a gift that reconnects us to the body of Christ, to other forgiven sinners who know what they were or would be without Jesus, but know what they are in Him too. To be citizens of heaven, to be part of His body, the church, we can even begin to live a whole different way in Him for others right now. You and I can forgive as we've been forgiven, we can encourage as we've been encouraged; we can serve as we have been served and we can love the way He loves us. That's the salvation that He has right now in store for you, body and soul. Put your faith in Him, it will make all the difference in your life. Amen.