

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Trinity 23 – November 12, 2023
Matthew 22:15-22 – Our Citizenship is in Heaven
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

“Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Christians seek a homeland. Like the saints and martyrs of old, we walk as strangers and exiles on this earth. We do not yearn for this world. We desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. For we know that our God has prepared for us a city.

And we already belong to that city. Our citizenship is in heaven. According to Hebrews 12, already, here in the church, we have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem. We already worship with innumerable angels in festal gathering, with the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven. For we have come to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to his sprinkled blood.

The church is like a colony of heaven on earth. A colony of pilgrims that must struggle against the temptations of the world. We are in the world, but not of it, just as our Savior was not of the world. For this world is evil; it follows the evil one. Around us many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ, enemies of the church. “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.” They set their minds on the pursuit of money and pleasure, instant gratification, honor and the approval of men.

We cannot walk that way. We must walk in a manner worthy of our heavenly calling. The life we live on earth is in preparation for the life to come. With eyes raised toward heaven, awaiting our Deliverer. And as we wait, we live by faith, enduring the scorn of the world, withstanding its temptation through Jesus Christ.

Do not imitate those who are at home in this world. Imitate Christ, so that you may be counted worthy of your calling. Imitate Christ, so that your lives may be a testament to the righteousness of God in him.

Imitate Christ, because the world does not care to study his word. It only reads the character and actions of those who follow him. We are being watched, so we must live differently. If the world sees us living with minds set on earthly things, it concludes that our religion is hypocrisy. Then we bring shame to God. And we give the world an excuse to go on in rebellion and the path of destruction.

But our citizenship is in heaven. So walk wisely, for the days are evil. Walk in the wisdom of Jesus. In his forgiveness and the strength of his love.

Imitate Christ, for he is the wisdom of God incarnate. As Proverbs 8 reveals, he has counsel and sound wisdom; he has insight, he has strength. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech he hates. By him kings reign, and princes rule. He loves those who love him, and those who seek him diligently find him. His fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and his yield than choice silver. For his path is the way of righteousness and justice. He grants an inheritance to those who love him, and fills their treasuries.

Only by his wisdom can we discern what is good, and live on this earth as citizens of heaven.

So learn from the wisdom he spoke when he walked on earth. Listen to his wisdom, when the Pharisees sought to trap him, when they asked him if it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not. By his wise answer, he taught us how to live on earth as citizens of heaven. He said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

He meant that we are citizens of both worlds. As citizens of earth, we owe a debt of honor and obedience to those who hold earthly authority from God. Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s. Render every duty that earthly citizenship involves. As Paul teaches in Romans 13. “Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”

Pay taxes to the government, and do it willingly. In fact, we should do it with greater diligence than the citizens of this world, so that we may be above reproach. As tax season approaches, we should not let saving money for ourselves become an idol. Worldly people put great effort into taking advantage of loopholes in the tax code, and making strategic contributions. But we should not imitate them. Simply pay what you owe, giving generously without seeking a reward. Handle money as a gift from God, not an idol to be pursued.

As for our heavenly citizenship, Romans 13 also teaches, “There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” Everything belongs to God. We owe him a far greater debt than we

owe to Caesar. For all we have is his gift. We owe him our very life. Salvation belongs to our God alone. Our citizenship is in heaven because of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because he rendered to God what is God's on our behalf. The Son of God rendered the lifeblood of God to God, for us. He purchased us as his own to call us his children and give us the inheritance of heavenly citizenship. He is the one thing needful, the only treasure. Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God and the power of God, our true and righteous king.

So imitate Christ, and render to God what is God's. All glory and honor are his. Render to him your whole life, because it belongs to him. Fear, love and trust in him above all things. And give him thanks for providing everything you need. Riches on earth to support your body and life, and the riches of heaven. Riches of forgiveness in his holy, precious blood. Riches of his word and sacrament to strengthen us for the kingdom.

And rejoice that your names are written in heaven, your true citizenship is there. This is your great comfort as you wait. It makes it a joy to render the debt we owe to God, as citizens of his kingdom. It makes it a joy to set our minds on heavenly things, and render to God the thanks and honor and glory due his name. It makes it a joy to live as citizens on earth in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. A joy to excel in the grace of generosity, to labor in honest work, so that we may have something to share with anyone in need. It makes it a joy to set our hope in God, who richly provides all things. And it makes it a joy to do good, be rich in good works, and be generous and ready to share. For we are already rich. We possess heaven itself, eternal life in Christ Jesus.

So keep waiting, eagerly expecting the glorious coming of your Savior. Look forward to the time when he will bring you home. For those who hope in him, the Last Day will not be a day of wrath. It will be a homecoming, our entrance into the beautiful place our Savior has gone to prepare.

Until that day, though the fight is hard, and waiting is hard, do not give up. For we do not fight alone. Already our Savior is with us here, in the church in his word and sacrament, to strengthen us. He assures us that our sins are forgiven. He encourages us that our homeland is near. He says, "Hold out a little longer! For I am coming soon, at the soonest possible moment, to lead you in triumph into the gates of my great city."

So stand firm, and persevere. Watch and wait for your Savior and King. Soon you shall hear his trumpet, when he comes to scatter all the enemies of his church. When he comes to subject all things to himself. To change our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body. And to bring us at last to our heavenly home. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.