

March 13, 2022
Second Sunday in Lent
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 13:31-35 (Jeremiah 26:8-15; Philippians 3:17 - 4:1)

OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from St Paul's letter to the Philippians, the 3rd chapter, which you heard read earlier.

There is an old adage that says: *"When it comes to a child, more is caught than taught."* It happens especially in a child's first few formative years. Everything they see, hear, and that happens around them influences them.

Think back to your earliest memories. As you toddled about the house, you watched your parents as they went about their daily routines of work and play: cooking food, cleaning and repairing around the house, and mowing the lawn. For better or for worse, you would try to imitate them. Their steps would become your steps as you tried to replicate their every move. They introduced you to new things and opened your eyes to new experiences: good habits and bad. This is why people say to you: *"You remind me so much of your mom."* Or: *"You act just like your dad."*

Even if you were privileged to be surrounded by perfect role models as you grew up, that does not mean that you'll always do the right thing. In life there is no such thing as auto-pilot. If you don't keep your eyes on the road and your hands on the wheel, you'll end up driving down a path of destruction.

Just look at Adam and Eve. They were created in the image of God and were given everything they could have ever wanted. But they fell for the lies of the devil and were driven out of the Garden. (cf: Genesis 3:1–24) And there was Moses, whom God called to lead His people out of bondage in Egypt and into the Promised Land. Moses spent a lot of time atop Mt Sinai with God, one time for forty days and forty nights. (cf: Exodus 24:18) Like Adam and Eve, what better role model could one have?

Toward the end of Israel's wilderness journey, the people were complaining about being thirsty. God told Moses to speak to the rock and water would flow forth. But Moses disobeyed the word of the Lord. Instead of speaking to it, Moses struck the rock twice to bring forth the water, giving the appearance that it was a work of Moses, not of God. (cf: Numbers 20:8–11) Because of that sin Moses and Aaron were denied the privilege of entering the Promised Land. (cf: Numbers 20:12)

The Bible is filled with people who had God and His prophets as their role models. The prophets were God's spokesmen, proclaiming the Word of the Lord. Even still, it was if the people would drive off into destruction. The Lord's prophets would repeatedly call His people to repent and return to the Lord or face His wrath. The Lord does not take pleasure in the death of anyone. He desires that all turn from their sin and live. (cf: Ezekiel 18:32) You sang these words earlier today from the prophet Joel:

“Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...” (LSB 157 [cf: Joel 2:13])

To be sure, there is destruction for all who do not repent, return to the Lord, and seek Him with their whole heart and walk in his ways. We heard the people of Judah's reaction to Jeremiah's prophesy of the destruction to come in our Old Testament reading. (cf: Jeremiah 26:8-15) In our Gospel text, Jesus prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and all who would not be gathered to Him. (cf: Luke 13:31-35) There is eternal ruin for all who do not trust alone in the Lord.

There are a lot of people who tempt you to take your eyes off your Savior and rather fix your eyes on the things of the world: climate change, wars and rumors of wars, and runaway inflation. They want you to live in fear of the ruin of worldly things. But while you are *in the world* you are ***not of the world!*** Your citizenship is in heaven. (cf: Philippians 3:20) You don't need to fear those who can kill the body but not the soul, rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (cf: Matthew 10:28) Fix your eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith. (cf: Hebrews 12:2)

In our epistle reading St Paul speaks of many whose ultimate end is destruction of body and soul in hell. Just as the people in the days of Jeremiah and Jesus were unwilling to repent and return to the Lord, so also was the case in Paul's day. Many chose to live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Paul is writing to:

“... all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi...” (Philippians 1:1)

... and writes to baptized saints of all times and places. The main theme of His letter is, in his words, is:

“... let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ...” (cf: Philippians 1:27)

... and he holds himself and Jesus as examples to imitate. It is a bit ironic that the same man who called himself “*chief of sinners*” would also tell people to imitate him. (cf: 1 Timothy 1:16) But when Paul offers himself as an example to follow, he is not being hypocritical or vain. He knows that he is a forgiven sinner, not some super-saint who did no wrong. (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:9–10) Paul knew that it was only by the grace of God that he was saved and able to live a godly life – and – he was quick to give all the glory to God. (cf: Romans 7:25; Ephesians 2:8)

Just prior to our text Paul warns the Philippian Christians of the ***Judiazers***, that is, the Jewish Christians who insisted that the Gentiles must be circumcised to be saved. (cf: Philippians 3:2) He calls them evildoers because by teaching that works of the Law were required, it obscured the need of Christ for salvation. It was like falsely saying: “*Jesus' death and resurrection isn't enough to save you. You need to help yourself over the finish line into heaven by your own works.*”

He goes on to tell them that at one time in his life, he was blameless so far as the Law was concerned. (cf: Philippians 3:4–6) But the Holy Spirit revealed to Him that personal righteousness doesn't come from the Law but from Christ alone by faith in Him alone. (cf: Philippians 3:9) Whatever gain he had he previously had he now counted as loss for the sake of Christ. He counted everything else as garbage so that he may gain Christ. (cf: Philippians 3:7–8) He says:

"¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us." (Philippians 3:17)

Even if you are privileged to be surrounded by good Christian role models, even today, that does not mean that you'll always do the right thing. Even those of us who have citizenship in heaven are tempted by the trinkets, trappings, and desires of the world. Plus, we have modern day Judaizers who proclaim the same false Gospel of works righteousness. We have others who preach a false gospel of: *"Eat, drink, and make merry for tomorrow we die."* (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:32) Like Adam and Eve, and Moses, and those enemies of the cross in Paul's day, you and I can quickly be deceived by the devil. Paul says:

"¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things." (Philippians 3:19)

The destruction of which Paul speaks is eternal damnation. Apart from Christ there is nothing but a fearful expectation of judgment in hell. (cf: Hebrews 10:27) Like God warned our ancestors of the tree in the Garden:

"... for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:17)

And as Jeremiah warned Judah of the destruction to come saying:

"This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant..." (Jeremiah 26:9)

And as Jesus lamented over Jerusalem:

"³⁵ Behold, your house is forsaken...." (Luke 13:35)

Every day people become secure in their sin and fall from faith. ***Their god is their belly.*** They devour whatever looks appealing and works for their own advantage. ***They glory in their shame*** as they live open sinful and unrepentant lives and encourage you to do the same. ***Their minds are set on earthly things*** because they have been deceived that all that matters is what can be seen and enjoyed in this world. If that is you, heed the warnings of the prophets. The Lord takes no pleasure in the death of anyone – but – He desires that all turn from their sin and live. (cf: Ezekiel 18:32) So repent of your sin and:

"Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love..." (LSB 157 [cf: Joel 2:13])

"⁹ If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Paul writes:

"... our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ 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." (Philippians 3:20–21)

Indeed, you have been made citizens of heaven. Your Savior Christ Jesus has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to you by His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. It was a divine necessity that Jesus suffer and die in Jerusalem to win victory over sin, death, and the grave for all mankind. Your proof that God the Father accepted the Son's vicarious sacrifice is the empty tomb. Jesus foretells of this proof to the Pharisees by saying that He would finish His course, reaching His goal, on the third day, the day that the Father raised Him from the dead. (cf: Luke 13:32–33)

Jesus came to usher in the Kingdom of God for all who believe and trust in Him. By means of your God given faith in Baptism, for the sake of Jesus' innocent suffering and death on the cross on your behalf, God made you a citizen of His Kingdom in heaven. While it is easy to be distracted by the concerns of *this world*, as a Baptized believer, you are *in the world* but *not of the world*. (cf: John 17:16)

As a citizen of the heaven you can now anxiously await your Savior's return. The Christian doesn't just sit around and twiddle their thumbs and wait on Christ's return. No. You
“... [fix your eyes on] *Jesus, the founder and perfecter of [y]our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*” (Hebrews 12:2)

You imitate St Paul and all the saints who have gone before, letting your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, walking and living as examples of citizens of Christ's kingdom. You occupy your mind with heavenly things such as worship, devotion, Bible study, prayer, performing good works and deeds, and sharing the Gospel of the Kingdom with your fellow citizens, and those who are not yet citizens.

You feed and sustain your faith with heavenly food, hearing the Gospel proclaimed, remembering your baptismal promises, and feasting on Jesus body and blood, given and shed for you. You stand firm to the end, anxiously awaiting the transformation of your body to be like His glorious body as He has promised on the Last Day. (cf: Philippians 3:21)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as heavenly citizens, you and I endure our time on earth and long for the day when our heavenly Father will take us home. The world, the devil, and your sinful flesh desire that you transfer your citizenship back into the world. But by the grace of God, the only transfer you will make is on the Last Day from a member of the Church militant to the Church triumphant and dwell with your Savior in His Kingdom forever.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.