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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**March 14, 2021**

**Kingdom Citizenship**

**Philippians 4:1-7**

**Prayer:** *Father, we thank you for the gift that you are to us, we thank you for being that gift and for sending us the gift of your word and sending us the gift of your Holy Spirit. And Lord, once again as we are opening up this treasured book, this gift, we pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, Lord, guide us, accompany us, enter into with us so we can make it of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, this is our thirteenth message from the book of Philippians and we are actually coming into the home stretch. We're at the fourth chapter, the fourth and last chapter, and Paul opens up that chapter by saying: *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!* Well, Paul's "therefore" is actually pointing back to a statement that he made as he ended the third chapter. He said this, he said: *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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.*

So if you remember, Paul's ending chapter three on a high note, having spent most of that chapter having focused on the dismal subject of the many enemies of the church at Philippi. If you recall, Paul has been dealing with the enemies of the cross, from the legalism of the judaizers to the debauchery of the libertines who wallowed in the sins of the flesh. Paul had harsh words for both. He referred to the legalists as dogs, as evil, as mutilators of the flesh and he referred to the libertines as enemies of the cross, whose God was their belly, whose glory was their shame and whose end was destruction. Well, Paul's denunciation of both of these extremes is rooted in the deep love that he has for the Philippian church, and because he loves them so intensely he resists and he resents those who would do this body harm.

So having completed his warnings to the church he then shifts gears, and he points out that since our citizenship is now in heaven, *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!* Not in the way of the judaizers, not in the way of the libertines but in the way of those who know where their citizenship lies. Then Paul goes on to take care of some local business. He says this in verse 2, he says: *I plead with Euodia*

*and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

Now that true companion that Paul is referring to may well be a play on words. I mean the Greek word "syzygus" is translated as "true yokefellow" or "true companion" and it could be a description or it could be somebody's proper name. In all likelihood it was someone who was known to be a true yokefellow, someone who pulled his own weight, someone who got along well with his fellow yoke partners. So Paul is asking this person to come alongside Euodia and Syntyche because he recognizes how crucial it is for healing to take place within this local body. And clearly these two women who were part of Paul's ministry in the past, having labored beside him, they're apparently now in the middle of a falling out. Paul's looking for healing and once again it just points out how readily the scripture just unfolds the humanness of the characters that are within it. You know Paul knows all too well about having falling outs with his fellow workers. He's had a few himself. He had one with Barnabas and he had one with Mark. In both cases they worked through these issues because they knew there was a far greater issue and that was the unity of the body of Christ. So Paul appeals to the very same thing here. He says again: *I plead with*

*Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

Now did you know that there is a book and in this book are the names of every single one who is headed toward or is already in heaven itself? You know we sing that song when the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there. That "roll" is a reference to that book. And it's a book you'll find referenced throughout the Old Testament and the New. When Moses was pleading with God on behalf of his people, he said this in *Exodus 32*, he said: *"But now, if you will forgive their sin -- but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written."* And when David was railing against God's enemies, he said this in *Psalms 69*, he said: *Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous.* Daniel's prophecy at the end of time said: *"At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book."* And finally the book of Revelation speaks over and over again of the critical importance of being in that

book. God is speaking of the heavenly city and this is what he says in Revelation 21, he says: *By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day -- and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.* Paul is saying our citizenship is in heaven. If you are a citizen of the kingdom, you will find your name written in that book. It is by far the most important passport you will ever own. And you know scripture also points out to the other end of this. It says if you are an outsider of the kingdom of God, if you are of the world, you will not find your name on that list and the consequences will be dire. Revelation 20 says: *Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.* So it turns out that citizenship is established in both kingdoms permanently, and having your name on that list is a matter of life or death eternally. There's no other citizenship that matters like this one does.

You know if you turn on the news you can't help but notice the overwhelming crisis that's now taking place on our southern border.

And it's a reminder to me of how easy it is to overlook the privilege that we have of being American citizens. Regardless the argument about legal or open borders, there's a human element that's absolutely unavoidable in this. I mean you can't see those videos of thousands of people dragging themselves hundreds of miles or giving up their children just to have them have the privilege of stepping on American soil without feeling some kind of sense of the desperation of these people. And it's for something that we seldom even think about. I mean we all have something that the rest of the world would kill or die for. I know I barely give it a second thought. I mean I can picture, I can certainly picture any of these people feeling like they could slap us for the privilege that we have that we don't even consider. I think of my favorite bumper sticker, the one that I have on my car. It quotes Ronald Reagan saying "I notice all those who are in favor of abortion have already been born." Well, you can say the same thing about border activity. I notice all those who are in favor of tight borders, they're already citizens. I mean, understand, I'm not for open borders at all, I'm saying if you are not moved by the desperation of these people, you probably need to check your heart. And also recognize that the ones who really do have a say in this, the ones who have legally stood in line, who have gone through the process, who have earned their citizenship, they are the ones who have every right to intensely resent those who are jumping in line ahead of

them. But the point that I want to make here is that we oftentimes as citizens take the very idea of citizenship for granted. Now multiply that whole understanding ten thousand fold and consider that we also take this statement: *"Our citizenship is in heaven,"* we take that for granted as well. It is the greatest privilege a human being could ever have and we think of it even less than we think about the privilege of American citizenship. Jesus was quick to point out how easy it is for us believers to take kingdom citizenship for granted.

It was an incident that Jesus at one point had sent out 72 workers into the field. *Luke 10* describes it. It says: *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. So these believers that go into the field and they have these spectacular results. It says: The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you."* But then Jesus goes on to put everything into its proper perspective. He says: *"Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

I mean, it should be readily apparent that it's incredibly important to have your name written in this book. So how are you going to go about doing that? Well, actually you can't. Having your name written there is not a reward for good behavior. God doesn't look down and see that person deserving, "Oh, yeah, he needs to go in the book." That's not the way it works. The point is this book has existed long before we ever existed and our names were written in it or not long before we were ever born. And furthermore if we have not been written in that book, there is no amount of trying that will ever make it so. And I know exactly what you're thinking. On the surface this seems incredibly unfair. I don't get my name in some book and therefore I don't even have a chance of ever getting into heaven? You need to look at it this way. First of all, God has declared that no one, no one has ever had a chance of getting into heaven ever since Adam and Eve betrayed us by trading their perfection for a taste of fruit that they thought would make them like God. We are sons and daughters of a fallen Adam and we too are under a curse. We are, all of us, unfit to be in God's presence. All of us have been disqualified by the fall which rendered all of us imperfect and no longer fit for heaven. And that's why God says in *Romans 3:23*: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* God goes on to say in *Romans 3:10*: *As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside;*



*together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* These are not the Bible verses that make it to the wall plaques or the crocheted pillowcases. They're not encouraging. In fact they're indictments. They're indictments that most people find shocking. One of our greatest spiritual shocks is discovering that we are not owed heaven at all. In fact God says just the opposite. He says every one of us is born an unconscious enemy of God and his kingdom. This is how God describes our natural state in *Ephesians 2*. He says: *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience -- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.* Folks are incredulous at the notion that we are by nature God's enemy. They just can't believe it. I like to point out that God literally became flesh and dwelt among us and he did so perfectly but because we were children of wrath, our response to him living perfectly among us was to mock him, then to strip him, then to flog him until he was almost dead and then nail him to a cross and mock him until he died. And after we had flogged him, Pilate put Jesus on display hoping that such a pathetic sight would stir some compassion and at least allow Jesus to live but even wicked Pilate had no idea what we were capable of.

Here's why I include all of us in the indictment. This is Matthew 27. It says: *So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."* And all the people answered, *"His blood be on us and on our children!"* We are those children. And yet for reasons known to God and God alone he has chosen to save some but not all of us. And those that he has chosen he has chosen before time even began. *Ephesians 1:3* says: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.* So those whom he predestined for adoption to himself, those are the ones that Paul describes when he's saying: *I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

So if your name is in the book of life, it is for reasons known to

God and God alone, and it's most definitely not because of your good behavior. God knows that if our good works got us into heaven, we would spend eternity strutting around like peacocks boasting about how worthy we were, which is why God insists that salvation is strictly a gift tied to nothing but his grace. He says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* See, the folks who were on this list, the ones whose names are written in the book, instead of being the most worthy, they're the ones who have been given the grace to see how desperately unworthy they really are. They've been given eyes to see and ears to hear and what they've seen with their eyes and heard with their ears is that God has given them the most precious gift a human being could ever receive, that's citizenship in heaven itself. I mean it's a gift that cost God himself his own son. He went to the cross and he offered up his perfection for our imperfection so that we by faith could stand before God clothed in his perfection rather than our own fallenness and brokenness.

But I suspect what you're thinking is what about those folks who are not written in that book? I mean why don't they have any citizenship in heaven? Aren't they just like those desperate folks that are now gathered on our southern border excluded because they haven't been chosen? Well the difference, spiritually speaking,

between those desperate people on our southern border and the rest of the world is that the people on our southern border desperately want in and the world desperately wants out. You have to understand that the nature of fallen mankind to understand that without God's direct intervention, mankind is grateful and thankful to be excluded from a list he wants nothing to do with. And if you doubt that at all, just go next door to your unbelieving neighbor and share with him the good news that God in Christ has fully paid his debt and that by faith he, too, can own Christ's righteousness and see how he or she responds. I mean we all know what the normal typical response would be. Take your religion, take your craziness somewhere else, please. I also know that by the grace of God someone actually stopped in their tracks and said, "Thank you so much for sharing this. How do I give my life to Christ?" that that would be literally by the grace of God. And we know that stranger things have happened. I mean I consider myself one of the very people that God miraculously turned on a dime, so I know of what I'm speaking. You see, the world is not complaining that they haven't made the list, they are thrilled that they're not on that list. They're relieved that the nonsense of the cross and its foolishness is not a part of their life experience. It's why God says: *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* So there's no such thing as a person saying, oh, I so desperately

wanted to be in the Lamb's book of life but God chose not to put me there. Because if you want to be in the Lamb's book of life, it's because God has put you there and has placed that desire inside you. In fact there's nobody on their own wants to be in the book of life because all of us are rebels and all of us on our own would never choose God. As God says: *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.*

You know an analogy that I would make of this, imagine yourself, you're an organic gardener. You're passionate about it. You're looking all around, you find a source for the best manure ever and you spend good money to hire a truck to deliver it to your garden. Somehow there's a mix-up in the truck and he winds up delivering the entire load to your next-door neighbor who's not happy at all, he's not a gardener and he's got this pile in his driveway. You see this as the best garden investment that money can buy and he looks at it as a pile of manure, something he wants to get rid of. Well, sad to say but most people, to most people the gospel is not in the least bit precious. And as it is, it is a pile of manure and folks are quite happy to have somebody take it away. I know I've had that reaction many times from the majority of folks that I've tried to share the gospel with and I also know I gave that reaction to people who tried to give the gospel to me. It's an

eternal mystery wondering who is chosen and who is not. To whom does this gospel make sense and to whom is it utter nonsense? Well, the choice alone is up to God. And I can tell you right now if we have only had a glimpse of the privilege that citizenship in the kingdom is, if we only had a moment's experience of what it entails, every one of us would be crawling over broken glass for the opportunity to grab it. We would also do whatever it takes to honor that citizenship.

And so Paul uses the citizenship in the way he addresses dealing with the practical aspects of the fallout between Euodia and Syntyche. And he says again: *Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.* And because those folks' names are written in the book of life, Paul then goes on to give three separate commands to all the citizens of the kingdom. Paul tells us we are to do three things. We are to rejoice, we are to be reasonable, and we are to be reassured. It all has to do with the fact that our relationship is in heaven.

So Paul says, first of all, he says rejoice. He says: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.* And the more you understand the citizen papers that are already signed and sealed

for you and the privilege as kingdom citizens that awaits you, the more you can face whatever life is handing you with joy. We're not just going to Disney World. We're going to rule and reign over all of creation throughout all of the universe forever and ever in an ever growing glorious transformation with a perfected body such as Christ himself has. In fact the entire process as I said last week is so beyond human ability to comprehend through either our senses or through the totality of our emotions that God says don't even try. He says: *But as it is written: "EYE HAS NOT SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NOR HAVE ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."* That's what our citizenship is all about.

And next Paul says be reasonable. He says: *Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.* Now this is actually a very interesting Greek word, the word that's translated here "reasonableness," it's a huge word. *Baker's New Testament Commentary* says this word might also be translated big hearted, but then it goes on to say this: "For big-heartedness one may substitute any of the following: forbearance, yieldedness, geniality, kindness, gentleness, sweet reasonableness, considerateness, charitableness, mildness, magnanimity, generosity. All of these qualities are combined in the adjective-noun that is used in the original." And what it's trying to communicate is that

the person who truly understands the magnitude of the gift of the citizenship he has received will have a certain level of magnanimity commensurate with his understanding of his gifting. And that's just a fancy way of saying the more you realize the incredible privilege that is in store for you, the more you are able to handle every single human indignity as a temporary light affliction just like Paul did. I mean he had that split screen vision that saw one side on earth and the other side in the heavenly kingdom, and thus it enabled him to see all things with a perspective that gave him the ability to handle all things in a big-hearted, reasonable way.

And finally Paul commands kingdom citizens to be reassured. He says: *The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Now I want to go back to a similar command that was uttered by Jesus to his disciples. This is the Gospel of John. Jesus said in this in John 14, he said: *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that*



*where I am you may be also.*" What we see here is Jesus is taking this idea of citizenship, he's taking it one step forward. He's going so far as to describe the very place that he's preparing for his kingdom citizens and not only is he describing the place that he's preparing but he's also saying I'm going to take you there myself. He tells the disciples the specifics because he doesn't want them anxious or troubled. And he links their ability to not be anxious with the fact that they're citizens of the kingdom and that they have a king who loves them and cares for them. And yet Jesus seems to be unable to appropriate what it is he's preaching. You see, Jesus himself according to the scripture at that time was very troubled in his spirit. Jesus knew the end was near. He was giving his disciples some last minute instructions. And the scripture then states very plainly *after saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit.* So we ask is Jesus guilty of saying do as I say not as I do? Is he not willing to practice what he preaches? Why could Jesus tell the disciples to not let their spirits be troubled when his was so deeply troubled? Jesus was troubled because he knew the very thing that gave the disciples the ability to be anxious for nothing was going to be stripped away from him. Jesus knew he was about to enter into a no man's land that no one had ever entered before and no one would ever enter again. The flawless Son of God was about to be completely cast out and utterly rejected by his Father and by the Holy Spirit as well.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit had agreed that the Son would be willing to take on the sins of the world to stand before God guilty as the sacrificial lamb, that he for our sakes would become our sin and God for the sake of his holiness would pour out his wrath not on us, but on him. *2 Corinthians* says: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* See, Paul tells us that we should be anxious for nothing because we're citizens of a kingdom who's king loved his citizens enough to become one of them, to then live the exact life that they should have lived and to live it out flawlessly and then to offer that life up as a sacrifice for all of our sins so that we could stand before a holy God not with our own fallenness and broken righteousness but with his flawless perfection, with Jesus' alien righteousness now belonging to us by faith. Well, in order to do that Jesus would have to tear apart a unity that existed for all time. I mean our God is one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit in three persons. As one person neatly put it, our God is one what and three who's? One what and three who's? The what is the singularity of God, our God is one. The three who's is the three persons: A Father, Son and Holy Spirit who make up the Godhead. This is the God of the kingdom that we are citizens in. And this God found the only solution for his perfect justice, mercy and love to be expressed to a creation he loved so deeply that had rebelled so completely that they had no hope of being citizens on

their own, the solution he found was the cross. On the cross the absolute perfection of the Son of God became every single wretched deed of the sheep that he was dying for so that God could say eye has not seen nor has ear heard what he has prepared for us as kingdom citizens. Jesus tells us that he's gone ahead of us to prepare for us this kingdom even down to the very rooms we're going to occupy.

And on the vast other end of that scale we can also say what it cost Christ. Eye would never be able to see, our ear would be able to hear the depth of the agony involved in flawless transcendent perfection taking on the vastness of filth of the sin of his sheep. I mean we've all felt the deep shame of guilt and sorrow over our sins and yet none of us would be able to adequately grapple with how it felt for the flawless One to have the weight of that shame and that guilt from the very first Adam all the way to the very last of us, to have that descend on him in the middle of the greatest physical torture human minds could conceive of and to be guilty of none of it. Add to that the complete and utter abandonment of the One who he had been with before time itself had even begun. I mean the Father whose utter perfection could not even look upon the grotesque corruption the Son had become on our behalf, he had no choice but to leave Jesus profoundly and transcendently alone to bear the just penalty of our sin. Why?

*Because God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life, so that we could have our names written in that book.*

Paul's answer to being anxious for nothing is and always has been the cross. And every time if you ever begin to doubt that God loves you, you need immediately to go to the cross. Because *for while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person -- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die -- but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* He died to redeem the citizen rights of every one of his sheep.

But now you have to know that all of this begs one gigantic question, the critical question that every one of us has to ask and answer ourselves, and it has to do with citizenship. Is your name written in the Lamb's book of life? You might say how am I supposed to know? How am I to tell? Well the very first tell of your citizenship, it has to do with whether or not you care. See, for the vast majority of people, your neighbors, your friends, those who just don't have the time for the kingdom, they may well be good natured about the fact that you just dumped a load of

gospel manure in their driveway, but as far as they're concerned, it's still a load of manure, and they would appreciate your taking it away, because to them it stinks. And that's just what God says about those whose names are not written in the book of life. He tells us we are to be the aroma of Christ to all of those around us but then he also says if they are not kingdom citizens, that aroma will have a stench to it. *2 Corinthians 2:14*, he says: *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? We know we are not sufficient. And if we have the Spirit of Christ in us we weep just like Christ did for those who refuse God's offer of salvation because we care for their souls and because we care so deeply about a kingdom they care nothing about.*

So the first question I need to ask myself if I'm a member of the kingdom is do I care about the kingdom? Do I care about the lost? Do they matter to me? Do the very things that moved Christ move me? You see, if your name is written in the Lamb's book of life, it's only because you have the Spirit of Christ within you. God even says that's how you test it. In *2 Corinthians 13* he says:

*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? -- unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

Hear what God's saying here? God's saying the only ones who really care about the kingdom are the ones who have the Spirit of Christ within them, because it's the Spirit of Christ that reorients our fallen human spirits towards the things of the kingdom. So you have to ask yourself, does that describe me? Do I care? And if you are reassured that you're on this list, that's good news. But if you're troubled, believe it or not, that's good news as well because that may well be God saying let's get your citizenship straight right here and right now. So if you're having any struggles whatsoever, if you feel God is speaking to you, speak to me, speak to one of the elders, speak to one of the deacons, let's get this squared away right now because nothing else matters. Then you can say along with Paul: *The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Let's pray.

*Father, I pray for each and every person that's here, if people are listening via You Tube, I just pray if they are troubled, if your Spirit is speaking to them, I pray that you would connect us,*

connect them, give them the ability to ferret this out, to get this straightened out, to get this squared away because, like I said, nothing else matters. And Lord, I pray that you would give us the heart that you have, a heart that wept over Jerusalem, that wept over unbelief. Lord, give us that same heart. We don't know who is saved and who is not but that shouldn't matter at all as we share the gospel we let you sort that out. Give us the grace, give us the wisdom, give us the courage to share that gospel with each and every person we come into contact with and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.