

Citizens Worthy of the Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] Excellent. We all like sometimes, don't we, to think of the different characteristics that we associate with different nationalities. And obviously, everyone is different, and I'm sure most of these are very inaccurate stereotypes.

And yet we still have perhaps this idea of the French being very suave and sophisticated, or the Germans being efficient and organised. You perhaps saw that recent RBS advert where the lady says, we Scots, we're friendly, we're kind, we're determined, we don't take ourselves too seriously, we're always there for each other.

It's a very generous assessment, I would think, of the Scots. But, you know, there we go. We have obviously these massive generalisations, but there is this kind of grain of truth in the idea that different nationalities, different groups or different cultures have these certain shared characteristics.

Well, this morning, we start what is really kind of the central core of this letter to the Philippians. And Paul is writing to establish and to remind the church of what our corporate identity should be.

The general characteristics of God's people. Our first verse there, verse 27, you see it says, And literally, actually, the words there, they say in the original Greek, behave as citizens worthy of the gospel.

[1 : 3 4] If you've got one of the blue church Bibles, you'll see that down in a little footnote if you brought a microscope with you or something. Also, if you flick over the page to the end of chapter 3, that's the kind of end of this central section of the bulk of the letter.

Chapter 3, verse 20, we read, But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. So this idea of being citizens, of citizenship, is a big one.

It brackets this section that we're looking at as Paul is writing to form together a distinctive people. A people with shared characteristics.

A people with a corporate identity. Citizens not of a specific nation, but as we saw there in chapter 3, citizens of heaven. And Paul is really speaking there about the church.

About those who are trusting in and are waiting for Jesus as their saviour. Now, what do these people look like? What distinguishing features do they have?

[2 : 4 0] How do they function as a society? And not just that, but how do we get there? What is the key to living that out? That is what we're going to be looking at this morning.

I think we can kind of think of this passage as kind of like concentric circles. First is the outside. Here's what citizenship worthy of the gospel looks like. And then inside of that, here's the key for how to live that out.

And then finally is the core, the heart of which this all relies on and which makes all of this possible. So we're going to kind of go from the outside in together this morning, thinking about Paul's teaching on being citizens worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So first up, as we said, what does this citizenship look like? What does this citizenship look like? What identity is Paul looking to forge in this people, in this church in Philippi, who he's originally writing to, but also in ourselves as a church?

As we said, we look to this Philippian church as a kind of a model church, a church to learn from, a church to aspire to. This is a really good church. What are the key characteristics of that that Paul gives us?

[3 : 55] What does this citizenship look like? And really, these verses here at the end of chapter 1 are in some ways a bit of a recap of what Paul has already said so far. And I think that's a really good thing, because when Paul is describing the key features of the church, it's not, you know, this, that, and the other, and all these other things.

And we kind of, you know, our heads talk to spin, and we think, well, never remember all of those. No, these are not unconnected things. Now, Paul actually returns to his kind of central theme, this central idea in this letter that we've spoken of already, of gospel partnership.

And that's what it means to live in a manner, to live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ. It means to be people who live in gospel partnership together.

And as we get a run through, really, at the end of chapter 1 of what that involves, we see first and foremost, it involves being united. Being united, that's again why this language of citizens and citizenship is significant, because it's not just about how we live individually, it's how we live corporately.

It's how we live together as a people. And you see that really emphasized there in verse 27. Paul says, So that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

[5 : 26] And that unity within the church is fundamentally important. Remember here, as Paul says that he might see them or he might be absent, he doesn't mean he might just not bother coming.

He actually means absent in terms of his death. We saw that a couple of weeks ago. He doesn't know if he will make it out of the prison cell that he is currently in for his faith.

And yet what he does say, what is fundamentally important to him, is that even if he doesn't make it, even if he is to depart and be with Christ, as he says up in verse 23, that the church that is left behind is a church that is united and standing side by side.

And I think it's really important that although this is perhaps something we speak about a lot as a church, it's something that we don't take lightly, it's something that we don't take for granted. Our kind of Western culture that we live in today is perhaps the most individualized culture at any point through history.

It's kind of defined by doing what's right for us, to be ourselves. It's a kind of an expressive individualism, it's often called. And like all these things, there are parts of that.

[6 : 41] God has made us as individuals with our own gifts. And yet also the church pushes back on that and says we're not just a bunch of individuals, you know, kind of looking to see what we can get, looking to do whatever it is we want to do, looking to see how a church can meet my particular needs.

We're not just a group of people who just happen to be in this one room for the same time once a week. But actually the church is a people united together where we take seriously the connection that we have with one another and also that the responsibility that we have for one another.

There's a few kind of practical ways that we can build that, I think, as a church. We're going to look at really what's the heart of that later on. But even just a few practical things that the Bible would often speak about that we can do.

One of those would be hospitality, I think, having people in our homes. Hospitality is not about having a kind of a big show house that you can bring people back to and having an incredible feast or a kind of a dinner party, although feel free to do that if that's your thing.

But hospitality is basically just about spending time together and doing that with people who you perhaps don't know that well just yet or perhaps bringing together people who don't yet know each other that well.

[8 : 04] Doing that with people who aren't just like you. Perhaps it's even just kind of catching up over a coffee with someone. Perhaps it's even just in a kind of smaller ways.

It's speaking to people before or after the service here at church that you've not met before. We're kind of aware that it's a shame at the moment we can't have kind of tea and coffee and stuff after the service.

That's just how it is right now. We'd love that to change. And yet I think we can still be looking for opportunities to chat with people who we don't know that well.

Perhaps even to things as mundane as where do we sit on a Sunday. Is there a chance to squeeze next to someone new? To sit next to someone we haven't spoken to before.

To kind of squeeze into a row and to introduce ourselves. I think it's great to remember with all these things, these little things, which isn't to say they're not challenging things. It's kind of hard to be the person who starts a conversation.

[8 : 59] But it's great to remember that in these little things, things all of us can do, actually that we're not just being friendly, it's actually becoming more like the church Paul wants us to be striving after.

It's actually part of being citizens together. It's actually a theological thing, we could say. And so unity is a big thing in living out this citizenship.

But then on top of that, we also see really clearly here that it's unity with a purpose. Remember we said again a few weeks ago, this gospel partnership is a proactive thing. And again, that's emphasized here.

See what Paul writes. He says that, This unity has a purpose.

It's an energetic thing. That word striving there, it actually has kind of the same root as where we get our word athletics. It's an active thing. Again, we mentioned this.

[10 : 06] You think of those kind of rugby scrums that you see in the Six Nations. It's people together, but not just together, not just kind of hugging each other for the sake of it. They're together, and they are pushing in the same direction, united in a common purpose.

And what is that purpose? Well, we see it here. It's for the faith of the gospel. The faith of the gospel. It is the gospel, the Christian message of Jesus, that as a church, we're to be committed to and striving for.

It's up on this banner here behind my head, which is getting slightly kind of dog-eared after a few years. Building community, sharing Jesus. I didn't come up with that, so I'm far cleverer than me did that, but it's a great kind of summary of what Paul is saying here, really.

That together, united in community, that's really good, but it doesn't end there because we have this purpose of sharing Jesus, of holding out the faith of the gospel.

And we do that within the church, with one another, sharing Jesus, reminding each other of the grace that we need and that grace that he constantly offers us again and again, helping us to have progress and joy in the faith, as Paul says earlier in this chapter.

[11 : 20] And then we also wanted to be doing that outside of the church as well, looking to share Jesus, looking to share the hope that the gospel offers, to share the joy that can be found only in him, to share that with the world around us as well.

It's worth remembering and then kind of facing up to the fact, you know, it takes effort to do those things. It's easier not to bother. But this partnership is an energetic thing.

It's a striving kind of thing. It's easy often to think of church simply as a place where, you know, kind of we retreat and we recharge our batteries and we do want to be a place where people are being built up and we're being strengthened and encouraged through the church.

But it's also the church, Paul says, is a place, is a community where we use our energy, where we invest our energy as well, as we come together to encourage each other so that both people inside the church and outside the church are able to be built up in the gospel and encouraged to love and to worship and to give their lives to God more and more and more.

And so there we go. What does citizenship look like? It's being united together. It's with a proactive purpose for the faith of the gospel. And then just lastly in this first section, it's doing that even in the face of opposition.

[12 : 41] Verse 28 goes on to say, not frightened in anything by your opponents. Remember, Paul is writing in prison because of his faith. He might be killed because of his faith. The Philippian church, they may be a model church, but they're a church who are under pressure.

That's the context that this letter is written in, is opposition. And it's in that context that they have to keep on going together. Again, picture that rugby scrum.

The fact that there are other people pushing in the other direction doesn't mean those four would say, oh, stop, stop, let go, let go. No, they pull in tighter as they stand, they strive, they push harder.

Paul is saying, don't be surprised when tough times come. In fact, Paul speaks about these things as a gift in verse 29. It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake.

This suffering is in itself that the confirmation that you're on the right path, Paul is saying. And as you hold together and keep going in that, it is a witness to the truth of the gospel and the ultimate salvation which will be for those who trust in Jesus.

[13 : 57] Again, an example of this that we've already mentioned would be kind of the commotion around Kate Forbes this week. And again, not to get involved in the political side of things like that, of that.

And as we said earlier, that the biblical views that she holds and that we would share as a church, we want to be up front and recognize that we know these are very counter-cultural views and they are speaking about very emotional issues.

We don't want to ignore that. Again, if people want to speak more about any of those things, please, please do. Please talk to us about that. But even kind of putting that aside, as much as anything else, it is the vitriol, isn't it?

It is the anger that has been poured out. It is that idea which has just been kind of publicly put out there that a person such as that is not suitable for a position of influence or has no place in public life.

Or if they do have a place, it has to be a certain number of rungs down the ladder. And that has been such a clear reminder, hasn't it, of the opposition that comes to Christians and to the church.

[15 : 06] For us, it's unlikely to be so high profile. I don't think many of us are likely to trend on Twitter anytime soon. And yet, there are still, there are those conversations at school.

There are still discussions that happen at work, perhaps even this last week, about Kate Forbes. And that's the kind of discussion that's not going to go away anytime soon, is it? It's so easy when those kind of questions are raised to then just sort of step back, to distance ourselves a little bit just to let go.

Paul's saying again that actually the characteristics of God's people, what defines the church, the citizens of heaven, is that they stay united and together and moving forward even in the face of opposition.

So there we go. What does this citizenship look like? It looks like this, that God's people are united, united with a purpose, with effort, and continuing in that even as there is pushback, even at times when it would be easier to just stop or distance ourselves from one another in the Bible's teaching.

It keeps on going. And I do hope actually that we see, I suppose, the attraction of that. That's as we said a couple of weeks ago, that this is a call to be spending our lives on something of real and eternal value.

[16 : 28] Paul is presenting this life of connection, of meaning, of purpose, things that so many people are searching after because actually that's how we're designed to live.

And that is what is offered in this citizenship, being God's people. And yet the great thing about this passage is Paul doesn't just tell us what that should look like, what we should be doing, he also gives us the how, how we get there.

So let's look at that together now. What does citizenship need? What do we need if we're going to live this out? And Paul here gives an incredible answer.

I think we perhaps take it for granted, but I think this is probably an answer that if we'd been asked this question, if we'd been kind of starting to write Philippians chapter 2, we would have started with all sorts of different things.

We might have led off with strength or what we really need is kind of ability or what we really need is organization or what we really need is a more kind of powerful voice for people to hear what we're going to say.

[17 : 32] What does Paul say that we need? What does citizenship need? He says it needs humility. It needs humility. Verse 3 of chapter 2, after again emphasizing this unity, the same mind, same love, full accord, Paul goes on to say this, do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility account others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his interests, but to the interests of others. Paul says if the church is to be a collective, a community, citizens united together, well, Paul says that a me first attitude, selfish ambition or the kind of conceit that thinks that we have all the answers and kind of puffs ourselves up above other people, lifts ourselves up with pride.

Paul says that is poison to unity. They're trying to be united together as a group of people who are all primarily concerned with themselves and their needs and what they can get.

It's like trying to kind of hold together a set of magnets all with the kind of the north faces pointing together. They just push apart that they can't be together. Or a self-serving attitude is like a big kind of boulder chucked into a frozen puddle and what was once together is broken into tiny pieces and scattered all over the place.

Instead, Paul says, there has to be this humility that puts others, the needs of others, serving others, the interests of others first and not our own agenda.

[19 : 18] It's as if we kind of look at the outside almost and we see this robust gospel partnership with a purpose that we've been talking about. Well, that can only happen because of what is on the inside, which is this humble care and concern for one another.

It's like a diamond where that kind of external strength is only possible because of that internal structure that makes it up. That internal structure in the church characterized by, as Paul says, not seeking our own glory, not seeking to elevate ourselves and our desires and our preferences, but rather serving one another.

Again, let's try and think about a few specific examples of what this looks like. I'm very grateful that I think we see a lot of humility in our church.

We're blessed with a lot of humble people who I won't mention because they would hate that. But so as much as anything, I think for us, this is a kind of a warning for us as to where that selfish ambition can creep in rather than us saying, okay, we need to get a hold of ourselves and do a complete 180 and change everything.

But we do need to be aware, where are these danger areas? I think perhaps strange as it sounds that serving in the church can be one of these. That's just how kind of insidious sin and pride are and that it can even skew the good things that we do.

[20 : 45] It's right that we serve in different ways, that we take our place in the purpose of the church and yet still it's very easy to serve based on, well, you know, what would fulfill me rather than where's a need where I can serve others.

And it's great to be able to serve in a way that fits us, that we enjoy, that's brilliant, there's nothing wrong with that at all but it's important to remember actually that is not the priority. Verse three, count others more significant than yourselves.

Verse four, look not only to his own interests but to the interests of others. We serve for the sake of others. We serve to serve a need, to serve the gospel and not ourselves.

Another area, perhaps we could see this selfish ambition or conceit kind of creep in or that perhaps it is more of a kind of a diagnostic, something that reveals it in us, I think is often how we react to the success of other people.

Are we able to rejoice at good things that happen or good things that are said about others or is our first kind of thing to think, oh, what about me? What are people saying about me?

[21 : 59] Tim Keller has written a great book, very small, about that called The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness. That's really highly recommended but it picks up on that idea of how humility is often described as not thinking less of yourself but of thinking of yourself less.

It's not saying, oh, I'm terrible, I'm awful but it's just having that confidence to be able to kind of put ourselves out of the picture and consider other people. It's as we do that that we're able to celebrate the good in others rather than constantly trying to rank ourselves against them.

I think this humility, this counting others more significant in ourselves. Thirdly, lastly here, it's perhaps most clearly seen in where are we spending our time.

Is our first concern always, you know, the stuff we want to do, the interests we want to pursue or actually, is that counting others more significant than ourselves which is pretty black and white here isn't it as it's written down?

Is that actually reflected in the concrete ways of how I've spent my last week? Is it reflected in my diary and where I commit my time to?

[23 : 14] Who I commit my time to? And that's absolutely not to say that we don't need boundaries or that we're just kind of at the mercy of whatever anyone wants and whenever they want it and actually that's not the best way to help people most of the time but I think the pendulum can kind of so far swing the other way.

We blunt the challenge of this so much. You know, our personal self-care becomes such a focus that actually we lose any emphasis on how we can serve others, on how we can be using our time not only for our own interests but for the interests of others.

How we spend our time is such a great revealer isn't it of where our priorities lie? Is it with ourselves or is it with others? And the truth of this passage that kind of opens up to us is that it is hard to have, perhaps impossible to have genuine community if we're not prepared to share our time with other people.

The humility that they're counting others more significant than ourselves that Paul speaks about is what makes that community, that gospel partnership possible and it then demonstrates itself in all sorts of different ways in our time, in our service, in our attitude.

And so we see that we need this humility and that's what this citizenship needs. But finally, how do we actually get it? That's the last thing we're going to look at this morning because you can't just say, can you all just be humble and someone says, okay, fine, I'll just do that.

[24 : 48] You know, thinking of ourselves first is in so many ways kind of baked into us, isn't it? It's an attitude or it's a way of life which is so hard to shift.

And as we said, actually, it's a really kind of counter-cultural attitude that that's not what the world is kind of trying to form us to do. The world is telling us to just be ourselves, express ourselves, you know, you be you.

And so how do we do that? How do we have this humility? Well, it leads us to our third and final point, really the very core of what we're looking at, which is what is this citizenship built on?

What is the heart of the church that enables this radical humility that we need? And we get the answer to this in verse 5 down to verse 11 of chapter 2. And I'm just going to read that whole section for us because it is such an incredible section, this combination of incredible theology being applied to this in some ways most mundane tasks of making us people of humility.

Now let me read those verses. Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of man and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross.

[26 : 21] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Now Paul says if we want genuine humility if we want that attitude that seeks to serve others that allows us to come together in unity to support one another even in the face of adversity then at the very heart of that has to be the gospel and that the only way to that is looking to Jesus.

Jesus who is God himself and yet didn't choose to kind of hold on to all that comes with that but humbled himself completely for the sake of others and for the sake of us.

The way these kind of verses work is that you just get this step down and down and down and down God who became a servant who became man who was obedient who died even death on a cross that the lowest most torturous humiliating form of death there has ever been who descended to the very depths and then it is because of that it's through that therefore verse 9 he has now been exalted and one day everyone will recognize Jesus as Lord to the glory of God the Father at the very heart of Christianity is the cross of Jesus the ultimate demonstration of humbly serving others and it's through that that Christ is exalted it is through that that we worship him and so it says we have that that mind of Christ it says we remember what he did for us it says we remember that the only way we're able to be his citizens citizens of heaven part of his church is through how he humbled himself for us it says in response to that we live for his glory and not ours that is how we're now able to show this humility to one another the charge of arrogance or pride is one that is sometimes laid against Christianity you know how can you say that you're right how can you say that Jesus is the only way and yet we see here actually that the type of people the type of community that the Christian faith holds out and forms is one that should be radically humble that actually the church cannot have a trace of arrogance or pride because it is all built on Jesus and his humility because it is faith in a God who gave everything even dying for us that our sins might be forgiven for us as a church together having that that mind of Christ keeping him at the center being built on him is the key to everything it is his incredible sacrificial life-giving humility that means we can find our hope and our security not in our efforts not in our achievements not in our reputation not what other people think of us or say about us but solely in what he has done for us and that in turn equips us enables us to live not out of selfish ambition not trying to big ourselves up but securing what Jesus has done for us we can live with true and genuine humility looking to serve others looking to elevate others looking to bless others humbly thinking more of others than ourselves and it is that love and service for one another that unites us that enables us to live together as citizens worthy of the gospel fully committed and standing firm striving for the faith of the gospel striving to build one another up so that we really do live with Jesus Christ as Lord and striving to reach out more and more that people would come to know

Jesus would come to know his love and all that he has done for them that in response to that that they too might put their trust in him that they too might recognize him as Lord as it says in verse 10 and 11 as we close so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father let's pray together Heavenly Father we thank you for Jesus we thank you for his humility that he humbled himself in obedience to death even death on a cross we thank you that he did that for us so that we can be forgiven that we can be your people citizens of heaven Lord we pray that we would have that that mind of Christ that gospel cross shaped mindset that would enable us to live out that beautiful picture of humble unity of serving together of love for one another and we ask that you would help us to do that in your strength and for your glory and so Lord please do go with us this week please help us to recognize where pride or selfish ambition might creep into our lives and Lord please would you shine the light of your gospel into those areas in us individually and as a church and in those areas please would you help us to look once again to Christ and to have the mind of Christ and to know that in those areas as in every single area of our life we don't need to prove ourselves we don't need to earn your favour we don't need to rank ourselves against one another but we can be fully secure of your love for us in the gospel and that through that we might serve one another joyfully as we share in that purpose of making Jesus and his wonderful love for us known and we pray all of these things in Jesus precious name

[33 : 00] Amen