

Galatians 6:14-16

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we approach another July 4 celebration, I was drawn to something I read some years ago. An American History teacher posed the following question to her class: "A distinguished foreigner was a big help to the American colonists during the Revolutionary War. Can anyone tell me his name?" And one boy blurted out, "God!"

A couple of thoughts went through my mind. First, The United States of America has been profusely blessed by God with His Word, food and access to material possessions. Secondly, He has become a foreigner - and one of little distinction - more so now than ever before.

Former Michigan congressman, Edgar J. Fredrick, who died this year, made this observation some years ago: "We are a nation with crises, but we only dully perceive their import. We spend much of our time in government today debating whether to travel first or second class on the Titanic." I would say we have hit the iceberg!

Tomorrow is July 4<sup>th</sup>. What is its meaning for us? How would you fill in the blank when I say . . .

### **MY COUNTRY IS \_\_\_\_\_?**

#### **I. 4 Points We Need to Keep Straight.**

In our text, Paul spells out 4 points we must keep straight in our journey through this world. He writes:

But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Point 1: In spite of all the fun and games, dreams and hopes this world might offer, Paul says, "the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." In other words, this world is dead to Paul and Paul is dead to this world. In other words, this world is not the goal! In other words, it is precisely what Jesus said, "I came that they (which includes us) may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) And that because, as Jesus said, "My Kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36) In all seriousness, you really don't believe that the latest cell phone technology, a trip around the world, accumulating stuff and hours a day on Face Book actually comprise a meaningful life, do you??

Point 2: In spite of all our worldly passions, pleasures, goals, dreams and boasting about them, Paul said, "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...". Why? Well, boast as much as you will about what you have, accomplish and do of this world, it will go away and be forgotten forever - just as you and I will go away and be forgotten forever, unless God intervenes. Why? Because "The wages of sin is death..." (Rom. 6:23) And that includes the death of everything. John writes, "And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." (I John 2:17) And what is "the will of God"? Jesus says, "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:40) Believes what? That Jesus perfectly kept God's law for us, paid for our sin crimes at the Cross and purchased our eternal life through His life, suffering, death and resurrection!

Point 3: "For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." Once again, everything of this world will come to its end. The "new creation" is rooted in these words from Peter: "(God) has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance...kept in heaven." (I Peter 1:3b-4) And, consequently . . .

Point 4: "...for all who walk by this rule (that is, their understanding of the end of everything here but the beginning of eternal life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ) - for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." Ultimately, that is not an earthly Israel, but the Heavenly Israel. The writer of Hebrews discussing the faith of the Old Testament saints says that they were looking forward to "a better country, that is, a heavenly one." (Hebrews 11:16) Again, **better country, a heavenly one**.

## II. 5 Quotes for You to Consider.

I have 5 quotes I'd like for you to consider for July 4th, 2016. It is interesting that they were all made before this century. The first quote is from Ted Lindman from 1975: "One of America's biggest problems is not simply bad people who do wrong, but good people who do nothing." (Church Herald, September 16, 1977, p.13)

The second quote is from Will Herbert from 1976: "The typical American has developed a remarkable capacity for being serious about religion without taking religion seriously." (Religion In Life, Summer 1976, p. 146)

The third quote is from Alexis de Toqueville, French political thinker and historian who died in 1859. While it has "this world" tones, what it says is worth noting:

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in fields and boundless forests; it was not there. I sought for it in her free schools and her institutions of learning; it was not there. I sought for it in her matchless Constitution and democratic congress; it was not there. Not until I went to the churches and temples of America and found them aflame with righteousness did I understand the greatness and genius of America. America is great because American is good, when America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

The fourth quote from J. D. Eppinga from 1976:

A whole nation sits glued to the tube watching all sorts of violence and adultery, night after night, and calls it entertainment! Meanwhile, others sit at the movies and eat popcorn while being sprayed with sex, profanity, and violence. When the lights go on again and the customers file out, the management fields a complaint. The popcorn was too salty. (*Banner*, Dec. 3, 1976)

And, finally, the fifth quote from the British historian A. J. Toynbee who died in 1975:

"Of the twenty-two civilizations that have appeared in history, nineteen of them collapsed when they reached the moral state the United States is in now." (Emphasis On Faith And Living, June 15, 1979, p. 3)

## III. Citizens of What?

And so, we come back to the last two thoughts I left with you before the five quotes. These words: **Better country. A heavenly one**. You see the connection, don't you? In our text, the Holy Spirit had Paul write, "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." And the Holy Spirit had the writer of Hebrews write that the saints of old - and, hopefully, the saints gathered in this sanctuary - desired and desire "a better country, that is a heavenly one."

And all this fits with Jesus' words to Pilate - words we know so well, but few truly grasp them: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." (Jn. 18:36) The spiritual quacks, charlatans, lying apostles and prophets who fatten their bank accounts with supposed Scriptural promises of an earthly good, prosperous, no suffering for Christ, happy world are nothing more than that: quacks, charlatans, lying apostles and prophets. And they are everywhere!

And if we understand that and everything I've put in front of you this morning, then the two following pieces of Scripture make everything clear and comforting. First, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Col. 3:2) That's why Paul could say, "...the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." And the second piece of Scripture:

"But our citizenship is in heaven, from it will 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.

"Therefore...stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved." (Philippians 3:20-4:1)

We thank God for the many blessings He has given us in this earthly country. We thank God we were born in the United States of America. And we are Americans. We love this country. We love all people, though we cannot agree with everything they believe. We love all people as God loved and loves us in Christ. But, finally, and most importantly - standing before us - one more time - those words: **Better country. A heavenly one.** And that's the answer to the blank I asked you about at the beginning of this sermon. **MY COUNTRY IS...HEAVEN.** To the glory of Christ!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

*July 3, 2016*

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- I. 4 Points We Need to Keep Straight.*
- II. 5 Quotes for You to Consider.*
- III. Citizens of What?*

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