



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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Jump Start # 1401

Philippians 4:20 *“For our citizenship is in Heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

The political shows are buzzing currently with debate about what to do with illegals who cross the border and come into this country. Some have committed violent crimes while in this country. Patrols, drones, fences, walls are some of the suggestions to push back on the tide of illegals.

There is another kind of alien to this country and that is the Christian. Although the Christian has citizenship here because of birth, he really belongs to another country, the heavenly one. When talking about this passage, the emphasis is often upon our hope, future and direction that we are traveling. Our destination is Heaven.

Those thoughts are good and useful, however there are two other aspects that sometimes blurs which country we truly belong to.

First, the behavior factor determines which country we belong to. Within the founding papers of the United States is the pursuit of happiness. Most seem to have gotten that one down pretty well. We love to be happy. We marry, divorce, marry again because of the happy factor. We do what we want because it makes us happy. This is where the clash of citizenships takes place. The call of Heaven is to be holy. You won't find the passage that directs us to be happy, especially, do anything you want to be happy. The same-sex crowd stands upon the platform that they have a right to be happy. They do in this country. But the country I belong to calls it's citizens to be holy. Being holy may not always bring happiness, at least not on the external and temporary side of things. Scriptures do not allow every married person to divorce simply because their marriage stinks or because they found someone better. I married too young, some have told me. I fell out of love, I've heard before. This person treats me so much nicer than my mate does. Don't I have a right to be happy? It depends? Which country are you a citizen of? If a person only does what this country allows, they may achieve happiness, but they will miss Heaven. God's home is for the holy, not the unholy.

Sleeping in on Sunday, hitting the golf course, going camping-it's my time and I have a right to spend it as I please. That's the thinking of citizens of this country. Christians belong to another country. Remember our verse today? Every country has it's own rules, rights and responsibilities. The country of Heaven demands that it's citizens follow Christ, walk in holiness and worship the Lord.

What we are seeing is that some want to be citizens of this country and yet get the eternal benefits of the Heavenly country. That's what some are complaining about politically with the illegal aliens that cross the border. Many want the benefits of our wages, health care and opportunities, but without having to pay taxes like the citizens do. That's not fair and right in most folk's book. How is it any different spiritually? Be holy, is what Peter told his readers. Be conformed to the image of Christ is what the Romans were told. Imitate Christ is what the Corinthians were told. The Ephesians were told to imitate God. Heaven's citizens do what pleases God. They won't do everything the citizens of this country do.

Second, the United States was built upon freedoms. The freedom to worship as one pleases. The freedom of speech. Those freedoms allow me to write Jump Starts. Those freedoms allow you to live where you want. However, those freedoms trickle into the spiritual and some get confused which country they belong to. While the United States may allow me the freedom to say anything on my mind, my citizenship in Heaven does not. If it is hurtful, mean, gossipy, Heaven's citizenship won't allow me to say those things. Heaven dictates how we are to treat one another. Heaven trumps my personal freedoms and rights. I have a right to do what I want, some demand. No, not when you become a citizen of Heaven. Jesus becomes your Lord. You do what the Lord wants. History and Biblical references show us that often doing what the Lord wants puts God's people in fiery furnaces, lion's dens, prison and even facing death. Hebrews tells us that some were sawn in two. Stephen was killed. James was killed. Antipas was killed. Our Jesus was killed. American rights do not trump Heaven's rights.

We belong to Heaven. We go along with the rules here as long as they go along with Heaven. When they don't, Heaven is chosen. That may put us on the lower end of the stick. It may lead to some difficulties. This isn't about us or our happiness but rather the glory of God. It would do well for folks to remember that God's church is not a democracy, but a theocracy. The will of the congregation cannot override the will of God. There can be no revolting, Boston tea party, mutiny that results in behavior, worship or attitudes that are counter to what the Bible teaches. We don't storm the pulpit with our demands. We don't threaten to force change because we don't like things. Now if a church is not following the Bible and if the leaders are leading away from God, that's a different story. We don't sit back and blindly follow the leader. We belong to Heaven. We follow God. If someone, anyone, wants to distort the message, pattern or ways of God, in the words of Galatians, he is to be accursed. It is time to bring about changes when God is being ignored. But much too often, it's simply I don't get my way, or I'm not happy, and that's the criteria for demands, threats and taking over the helm of the ship.

We are citizens of Heaven. We don't change because it's more comfortable, we fit in better, or we become less offensive to others. Let your light shine. The darker the times, the brighter the light becomes. The darker the times the more noticeable the light becomes. The same light that attracts some, blinds others.

We are citizens of Heaven. This is where our heart is. This is where we want to be. I've been to foreign countries before. Neat things to see. Strange food. Interesting cultures. Not home. Not where I wanted to spend the rest of my life. Our real home isn't America, it's Heaven. Let's act like Heaven's citizens. Let's remember that we follow the Lord.

We sing, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through..."

Roger Shouse

