

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors on staff at North Shore Alliance Church. It's hard to believe that we are only four weeks away from Christmas; it's been a good Fall. While the Christmas decorations are going up all around us, we're not quite finished with our "**In Christ**" teaching series. Next week Mardi will wrap things up, and then we will spend a few weeks focussed on the birth of Jesus.

Introduction: As I begin this morning, I'd like to begin by way of a survey: by a show of hands, how many of you were born in the country of Canada? I was born in Surrey, British Columbia, on June 17th, 1973. I'm as Canadian as one can be: I was born here, raised here, and have never been beyond Canada's borders for more than 5 consecutive weeks. But one of the things that I love about our country is the fact that our nation has embraced new citizens from other nations all over the world.

How many of you were born in a country other than Canada? Lets take a few moments and see how many different nations we have represented among us. If you were born in another country, call out the name of the country you came from.

Are there any Texans among us this morning? I love Texans...I traveled throughout Israel with some Texans and they were some of the funnest people I have ever met. But what struck me about these Texans was how proud they were of where they had been born; on more than one occasion they said to me: *Mark, Texas is the best damn country in the whole world!* I didn't have the heart to tell them that Texas wasn't a country.

Again, by a show of hands, how many of you have dual citizenship? My daughter Anna is a dual citizen; she was born in Thailand, but joined our family as a 2 year old and has since become a Canadian citizen. Anna has history in two countries; both countries are important, and both mark her life. We're actually planning to goback to Thailand this Summer so that Anna can get reacquainted with the country and the people that shaped the first 2 years of her life.

Dual citizens have their roots planted in two different countries, and sometimes it can be a little disorienting; every country can have a different language, culture, values, and norms. What is culturally acceptable in Texas, might be a little over-the-top here. Some of the the values that are commonplace in the Congo, will likely be uncommon here. Dual citizens can feel the pull of their birth country, even after spending decades in another.

This morning I'd like to introduce you to another aspect of our life in Christ; the Bible tells us that **in Christ we are citizens of heaven**. And if we think about it, that makes us dual citizens doesn't it? As followers of Jesus, we have our feet firmly planted on the earth and yet, **in Christ**, we belong to a heavenly country as well. The question is: *how do we live with our feet planted in two places?*

God's word gives us instruction for doing exactly that, and I'd like to invite you to take a Bible and turn with me to Philippians 3; if you are going to use the blue Bible right in front of you, you can find our text on **1829**. I'm going to begin at verse 7, but I'm going to jump around a little bit; please follow along as I read.

"whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the

surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...13 Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. 15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things...

17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ...19 Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

Before I talk about how to live with our feet planted in two places, I want to talk for a few minutes about what it means to be a citizen of heaven.

illus: if you’ve ever gone through the process to become a citizen, then you know that one doesn’t become a Canadian by hanging around Canadians, or even by living in this country for a long time; there’s a process involved. If you want to become a citizen, there are requirements to meet, application forms to fill out, and a test to pass. We automatically become citizens of heaven by virtue of our being **in Christ**, but one doesn’t become a Christian by hanging out with other

Christians, or by spending a lot of time in church. In Colossians 1:13-14 we read, “**13** For [God] has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, **14** who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.”¹

Now even if we can’t point to an exact date on the calendar, there is a before and after, when it comes to life in Christ. Jesus died for us, instead of us, and in doing so He bore the weight of our sins, paying the penalty for our rebellion against God. When we receive the forgiveness that God offers through Jesus, we are adopted as His son or daughter and on this basis we become citizens of heaven. As His adopted children, God’s dwelling place becomes our dwelling place; we become citizens of His heavenly country.

I trust this gives you a sense of tremendous security. In the financial world, there’s no such thing a zero-risk investment. In the realm of human relationships, there’s no such thing as a zero-risk relationship, but we do find rock-solid-security **in Christ**.

Last week I talked about the Holy Spirit marking our lives with power and authority, but in Ephesians 1:13-14, we read about the “sealing” work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s presence in our life functions like a deposit, a down-payment, guaranteeing our identity and our inheritance. To put it another way, the Spirit’s presence in our lives is proof that we are not illegal aliens; God is not going to deport us.

¹ New Living Translation.

Douglas Moo writes, “We belong to the ultimate ‘in group,’ those who are the dearly loved children of God...our adoption is permanent. Nothing can change that; nothing and nobody can keep us from enjoying God’s favor and blessing forever.”² In other words, **God will not un-choose us...we belong to Him, and He belongs to us.**

Our Scripture this morning is taken from a letter Paul wrote to a church that gathered in a Roman colony of Philippi. This Macedonian city hadn’t always been a Roman colony, but when Caesar Augustus (Octavius) won a decisive victory here, the rights/privileges of Rome were conferred on the city. A Roman citizen belonged to the most powerful nation on the earth; to be a citizen of Rome was a great honour.

illus: most of us remember what it was like for our city to host the 2010 Winter Olympics; it was more than simply Vancouver’s Olympics wasn’t it? Do you remember the sea of red? The crowds in the streets? The national pride that swelled day by day? In the previous two Olympics held on Canadian soil, not a single gold medal had been won by a Canadian Athlete, but all of that came to an end when Alexandre Bilodeau won gold. And he was not alone, before the conclusion of the Games, Canadians won a total of 14 gold medals; more than any other nation.

I was here in this sanctuary, with a few hundred of you, when Sidney Crosby scored the golden goal to seal a victory over our American rivals. I remember the shout that went up, our collective pride in being Canadian, I can remember looking at my son and seeing the same pride in his eyes that I felt in my heart. I like being Canadian, I’m proud to be a Canadian...but **in Christ** I am a citizen of a greater Kingdom by far. In Christ, we belong to a Kingdom without limit and without end.

So back to my original question: *how do we live with our feet planted in two places at the same time* (on earth and in heaven)?

I think we need to begin by admitting that it’s more difficult than it sounds, and that we get it wrong some of the time; humility is required. But I also think that we need to appreciate just how different the norms, values, and priorities of earth are when contrasted with the norms, values, and priorities that govern life in God’s realm. At times we are being pulled in two different directions.

For the last seven weeks we have been saying that we live **in Christ:** His life defines our life. But we need to recognize that our life in Christ is not being lived out in a neutral culture; we live in a culture that also seeks to define us. And we need to be able to think Christianly, Biblically, in order to discern which aspects of our culture can be embraced, and which need to be rejected.³

² Douglas J. Moo, *NIV Application Commentary: Romans*, 263.

³ Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, 41.

Gordon Smith writes, “It takes so little for Christians to be blindsided, consumed by our cultural context, and unaware often of how we are overly identified with its longings, values, and aspirations. In order to be entirely engaged in the world yet not live by its values, our only recourse is to live in the reign of Jesus.”⁴

The Bible does speak of heaven as being a “place”--the place where God dwells--but because the Kingdom of Heaven has already broken into our world, we can also think speak of heaven in terms of a “mindset” or “orientation.” We are called by God to align ourselves in the present, with the longings, aspirations, and values of heaven; this is, in part, what it means to live out our heavenly citizenship on earth.

Where have I, where have we, overly identified with our culture’s longings, values, and aspirations? This would be a great conversation to have in your small group. How much time do we spend wanting to be great instead of living to make His name great? How much time do we spend agonizing over what others think about us instead of caring what He thinks?

Let’s bring this down to street level, to where we all live. I’m going to talk about two subjects, time and money, and show how Christ and culture can pull us in two very different directions. Lets start with money.

Is it possible to have too much money? What does our culture tell us? What does Jesus tell us? Money can be an idol: it can become something we chase after, lust after, and worship. Money can be both

liar and thief: it promises the world, but steals our affection from what matters most.

What drives our spending? Needs? Wants? Likely a blend of both, but we live in a culture that has equated wants with needs...whatever it takes to make us happy has been defined as a “need;” self-fulfillment trumps all other pursuits. Is a lot of our spending self-centered, and entertainment driven? If so, we have overly-identified with our cultures and its longings.

Is our spending Christ-centered, sacrificial, and generous? Every time we prioritize other people’s needs by curtailing our “wants,” we operate according to Kingdom economics. I can remember sitting down with an H&R Block tax professional to help us with our year end taxes.

Naomi and I came armed with a folder of paperwork, T4’s, charitable receipts, and the like. And when he started to input our charitable receipts, he had a genuine look of bewilderment on his face. At one point he said something to the affect of, “*do you realize that you are giving away a lot more than you can get tax credit for?*”

- “Yes...we know.” Christians live by a different set of values.

How about our time? Are we Christ-centered, sacrificial, and generous in how spend our time? What would your neighbours think if you told them you spent a half day in solitude, praying, listening to God, worshipping, reading the Bible? Would they see it as time well-spent? Would it matter? Are we investing our time in quiet places

⁴ Gordon T. Smith, *On The Way: A Guide To Christian Spirituality*, 10.

with God? Are we inviting Him into our everyday routines, our decisions, our relationships?

I suspect many of us are familiar with the following proverb: “*when in Rome, do as the Romans do.*” The idea being that we are to adapt to the values and behaviour of the people around us...the end goal is to blend in.

As I’ve said before, the Apostle Paul’s sense of geography was informed by his theology. He wrote to the church in Christ, in Philippi. In the same way, I could refer to us as a church in Christ, in North Vancouver. One author writes, “This sense of geography is important...We can neither avoid the place where we live nor betray the Christ in whom we live.”⁵

In the time remaining, I’d like to offer two encouragements that come directly from Philippians 3, and first can be found in vs. 19-21.

1. Look up!

We are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of being pulled, unwittingly, into the longings, values, and aspirations of our culture, we need to look up and see Jesus.

When it comes to certain longings, values, and aspirations, we need to plant ourselves **in Christ** and say, “**I will not because am not of this world**”...I belong to a heavenly country. For what place do things like greed, sexual license, or the seeking after power/position have to do with life in Christ?

⁵ Snodgrass, 42.

We need to recognize that ultimate fulfillment lies beyond this life. Apart from Christ, the pursuit of gratification becomes a bottomless pit. We need to **look up** and see what pleases Christ; when we live our lives for His sake we find a life of significance, purpose, and meaning.

illus: Let me offer an analogy. For those of you who were born in South Africa but now reside in Canada, perhaps you have wrestled with whether to define yourself as a Canadian South African, or as a South African Canadian? Which is it? Both exert an influence, but which is greater?

Being a citizen of heaven does not revoke our citizenship on earth, but that being said, one citizenship will be primary; the influence cannot be 50%-50%. I’m proud to be a Canadian but because I am **in Christ**, I’m a citizen of a greater kingdom than Canada, I serve a greater leader than our Prime Minister, and I am living for a greater reward than Freedom 55. As a follower of Jesus, I’m a part of heaven’s outpost here on the North Shore of Vancouver. **Look up!**

The second encouragement I’d like to leave you with is found in Philippians 3:13-14, and it’s this...

2. Run the race...run for the prize!

Paul writes, “**13** Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, **14** I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

illus: I can remember standing at the starting line of my first 10 km race, and wanting to avoid all the rookie mistakes that are so often made: eating too much before the race, starting too fast, starting too slow, etc.

When the starting gun went off, I began to run my race, settling into the right pace, but around the 2 km mark I noticed something peculiar. A man went running by me like I was standing still, but he came to a dead stop 50 meters in front of me; he promptly bent down and began to tie his shoe. “*Poor guy,*” I thought to myself, as I went running by.

A couple minutes later he went blazing by me, but once again he came to a dead stop 50 meters later; he bent down and began to tie his shoe a second time. I was feeling really bad for him at this point; I thought to myself, “*there’s nothing worse than starting and stopping in the middle of a race.*”

I went by him a second time but it wasn’t long before he had passed me yet again, and if you can believe it, not more than a few meters ahead of he, he bent down a third time to tie his shoe. At this point, I was beyond feeling bad for him, and as I passed him a third time I said out loud, “*try double-knotting your shoes.*” I think he must have heard me, because he went by me a 4th time and I didn’t see him again. His shoelaces were an unnecessary distraction.

Running the race, running for the prize has nothing to do with sitting around and waiting for heaven; it has everything to do with living the life of the future in the present. We need to run, we need to live, with

focus. We may be citizens of heaven, but we have been located **in Christ and by Christ** in a particular earthly outpost. And there are times when we need to say “*This is my Father’s world,*” and then roll up our sleeves and engage.

When a building is not worth fixing, we reduce it to rubble and start all over again, but when it comes to this world, God intends to redeem and restore. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “*my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*”

A future-looking-focus allows us to keep running this race, to really “see” and prioritize in the present. Tom Wright has the following to say, “what you do in the Lord *is not in vain*. You are not oiling the wheels of a machine that’s about to roll over a cliff.”⁶ We run for the prize every time we pray for God’s kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. Every time we join God in working for justice, beauty, and love, we are contending for the world as it will one day be. Jesus will return and He will put this world back to rights.

Conclusion: I want to conclude this morning with some of the rambling from my own, prayer journal. This week I’ve been thinking about what it means for me to be a citizen of heaven and earth. Here are my thoughts, in the form of a prayer:

Jesus, I am setting my sights on what is of infinite importance; everything else pales in the light of Your glory; everything else is but a shadow when compared to You. I am prioritizing the loves of my

⁶ N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, 208.

life, and Father; I want you to come out on top. Holy Spirit, orient my life, my decisions, my priorities, my pursuits around Jesus...I want my “in Christ” status to affect the practical realities of everyday life.

I am a citizen of heaven. What this means is that I will deliberately submit my thinking to Your thoughts (Scripture); where I am off track, I will surrender my thoughts to Yours. I am a citizen of heaven. What this means is that I will deliberately submit my desires to Your desires; where I am out of sync, I will surrender my desires to Yours.⁷

Sometimes I live as though this world is all that there is, but You’ve given me a new perspective. There is a life to come...a redeemed, renewed, restored version of this world is coming...and rather than sit around, moaning, moping, and complaining, I’m choosing to live the life of the future in the present. Jesus, You’ve saved me, You’re returning, and because I don’t know when, I’m doing more than waiting around, I’m already preparing. I know what is coming--whole-sale transformation--it’s already happening!

*Jesus, when I say that I’m a citizen of heaven, it doesn’t mean that I no longer care about what’s happening around me. **Because** I’m a citizen of heaven, I am beginning to understand what matters to You, and what life looks like under Your leadership. You care about beauty, justice, and love, so I will too. Jesus, because of You, I want to find a way to live in the “now” with an eye towards the “then”.*

Heaven has already invaded earth but it’s not a hostile takeover, it’s a gracious infusion of God’s life. Redemption. Renewal. Restoration. It’s already happening in me, in us, in our world. We are citizens of

heaven and earth...may His influence mark our life on the North Shore.

Pray

Benediction:

Dual citizens need dual prayers, and so we pray:

- (a) Father, may your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We pray for God’s way, for His will, for His rule to expand on the earth because it is better than the way, will, or rule of any country on earth.
- (b) But we also pray, *Marantha*: come Lord Jesus, return quickly, because we know that His Kingdom of wholeness will not be here in fullness until He returns.

Dual citizens need dual prayers.

⁷ Colossians 3:1-4.