

Cruciform heavenly citizens

Philippians 3:17-4:1

By pastor Ken Keyte

Date: June 6th 2016

1

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2

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This passage is about how heavenly citizens are "co-markers" of the cross, *eagerly awaiting* our saviour's return, while *standing firm* in the Lord *this way*.

Heavenly citizens are "co-markers" of the cross

3



When Paul wrote:

" Join together in following my example, and keep your eyes on those who live according to the pattern we gave you", it was *such a special thing* he was *calling the church to do* that he *coined a new word* that *isn't* found anywhere else in the New Testament or in any other ancient Greek literature.

With this *unique Greek word* Paul called the church to be "*co-imitators*" of himself who is an *imitator of Christ*.

Which is *why* I wanted to show you that *news clip* of the kids *forming an arrow* pointing to where the *runaway criminal* was hiding.

Together they were being "co-imitators" of an *arrow shape* pointing to where the criminal was, and by *doing* so they enabled the police helicopter pilot to *spot them* and *direct* the ground team to *catch* the runaway criminal.

- *By herself*, the girl who had the idea of forming a human arrow, *wasn't big enough* to be seen by the helicopter pilot, if she'd tried lying down in the shape of an arrow all by herself.
- If the other kids *didn't want to be an arrow* and decided to form up as a *circle* or a *square* instead, the shape *wouldn't* have *directed the pilot* to the runaway criminal.
- And if some of the kids had *broken formation* before the pilot had *spotted them*, they *wouldn't* have been *noticed* either and the criminal would've most likely *escaped*.

But in *forming up together* the way they did, the kids were being "*co-imitators*" of an *arrow shape*.

Which is a *great illustration* (I think) of what *Paul* is calling the Philippian church to *do and be together*, when he instructs them to be "*co-imitators*" of *himself*, who is an *imitator of Christ*.

Remember how *at the heart* of Paul's letter to the Philippians is the '*Christ-hymn*' and in the *Christ-hymn* we see the *pattern of cruciformity* in the *story of the cross*.

- We see the *pattern of cruciform faithfulness* in Christ *obediently going to the cross*
- We see the *pattern of cruciform love* in Christ *not* using his position of equality with God for *selfish gain* but to become a *servant instead*
- We see the *pattern of cruciform power* in the *paradox* of Christ's *suffering crucifixion* as the means by which *God's power worked*.
- And we see the *pattern of cruciform hope* in Christ's *reversal* from *death to resurrection* and then *exaltation as Lord of all!*

These *patterns of the cross* are the equivalent of being an '*arrow marker*', pointing (*not* to a runaway criminal) but to *Jesus* and the *kingdom of heaven* he brings to earth.

Very much like the girl in the news clip *calling her friends to form up in the shape of an arrow* pointing to where the criminal was, *Paul* is calling the *church* to form up in the *pattern of the cross*, *marking out* where *Jesus* and the *kingdom of heaven* is to be found.

If *Paul* can *coin a new Greek word* to describe this *unique activity* he's calling the church to, then *I can to!*

I'm calling it "*co-marking*".

3a

Heavenly citizens are called to be "*co-markers*" of the *cross!*

But to *help them see* what this *cruciform shape* looks like, so they can be "*co-imitators*" of Christ together, *Paul* presents *himself* as the *template* upon which they can *form up*.

You see, *all through* this letter to the Philippians, *Paul's* been *demonstrating* to them what the *shape of cruciform: faith, love, power and hope are like*.

I've been pointing this out to *you too* as we've been going through his letter in this preaching series.

Here's some *memory joggers!*

- When Paul wrote from prison (1:12):
"I want you to know that what has happened to me has really helped to spread the gospel, so that it's become known throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else, that I am in chains for Christ."
- he was practicing *cruciform faithful obedience* to God.

- *Even though* Paul could've done with *Epaphroditus's help* as a *brother, co-worker, fellow soldier, messenger and minister* to his need (while in prison), Paul sent *Epahroditus* back to *Philippi* as an act of *voluntary self-giving regard for Epaphroditus and the Philippian church*, - which is an example of the *pattern of cruciform love*.
- When Paul wrote (3:10);
"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death",
- he was *demonstrating cruciform power* in his life and possibly imminent death!
- And then when he wrote (3:14):
"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."
- With this *reversal from death to resurrection*, he was giving them a *preview* of what's yet to come- and by doing so he was being a *sign of cruciform hope!*

But what I *hadn't appreciated* till reading this passage *again* was the *togetherness* and *teamwork* required in order to follow Paul's instruction to be "*co-imitators*" of the *pattern of the cross*.

You can *try* to be an imitator of Christ *all by yourself*.
But you might not be a *very good one!*

But as a "*co-imitator*" of Christ, the *areas* where *I* may not yet be a *very good imitation of Christ* will most likely be *made up for* by someone else who is a *better imitation of Christ* than me in that area. And *vice versa*.

And when we *all form up together* as "*co-imitators*" of Christ we form a *much bigger, much better, much more complete and attention grabbing* marker sign of *Christ and the kingdom of heaven*, than *even the best of us* could be *alone!*

Those of you who gave up your time and energy over the last couple of days picking kiwifruit to raise funds for our Christians Against Poverty Debt Help Centre, are an example of that!

None of us could have picked very much fruit *alone*, but *together* when we *gave up* whatever we might have *otherwise been doing* to *pick kiwifruit* to raise funds that will *help people get out of unmanageable debt*, we worked together as an expression of *cruciform love!*

And the *reversal* of people's lives from being *stuck in debt* to being *financially free*, is a sign of *cruciform hope!*

Much like the *children who formed up together in the shape of an arrow to catch a criminal*, when we form up together in the *cruciform pattern of Jesus* by imitating the *cruciform example of Paul*, we *point* to where *Jesus and his kingdom* are found.

Because *heavenly citizens* are called to be "*co-markers*" of the cross!

Heavenly citizens eagerly await our saviour's return

4



About 100 years before Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, Mark Antony and Octavian (sons of Julius Caesar) confronted their father's assassins (Brutus and Cassius) at the battle of Philippi on the plain, west of the city in 42 BC.

Upon winning a decisive battle there, Octavian *conferred on Philippi, the right to be governed as if it were a city of Italy*. He also released some of his *veteran soldiers to colonise the city*. Then after receiving the title *Caesar Augustus* from the Roman Senate in 27BC, the city was renamed *Colonia Augusta Iulia Philippensis* in honour of the emperor.

It was a city *governed by Roman law and administered by officers appointed by Rome*.

And since it had been *colonised by Roman soldiers*, many citizens of Philippi were *also Roman citizens*.

All this meant that although *Philippi* was located *several hundred kilometers from Italy, in Macedonia*, its *ties to Rome* were *very strong indeed!*

And since the city had been *honoured by the Emperor*, there was a strong sense of *loyalty to Caesar* who regarded him as *their saviour*, who they hoped would *visit them* some day.

For *all these reasons* the citizens of Philippi thought of their city as being *an outpost of Rome*.

Paul would've been *very aware of this* when he writes, "But *our citizenship* is in *heaven* and we *eagerly await a saviour from there*."

The Philippian Christian's *couldn't have missed* what Paul was *getting at*. Rather than being *proud Roman citizens*, in a *distant outpost of Rome*, longing for their *emperor/saviour* to visit them, *they were heavenly citizens* in a *distant outpost of heaven* that was the *Philippian church*, *eagerly awaiting Jesus the saviour to return* one day!

4a

Before giving up my Dairy Industry career to become a pastor, I was posted to New Zealand Milk products in Santa Rosa California, (quite a long time ago now!).

Although Raewyn and I enjoyed living like Americans for the three years we were there, we remained absolutely, solidly, through and through, proud New Zealand citizens!

While the *Americas Cup* was on, it was *Peter Blake and Team New Zealand* we were *cheering for!* Even though our American friends hardly even knew what the *Americas cup* was!

Every morning the *first thing I read at work* was the *New Zealand news in brief* that was delivered to my in tray.

Whenever we *bumped into other Kiwi citizens living in California*, it was like we were meeting *long lost friends*, even though we'd never met them before!

Whenever, we got together with the other NZ employees of NZMilk Products and their families, which we we often did, it was like we were a *little outpost of New Zealand* in Santa Rosa California!

And whenever we had *friends or family coming out to visit us*, we *eagerly awaited their arrival*, looking forward to *picking them up from the airport* and bringing them to our home to stay!

Even though we *enjoyed living like Americans* for the three years we were there, we were *absolutely, solidly, through and through, proud New Zealand citizens*, living like a little *outpost of New Zealand* far from home.

That's *something like* what it would've been like for the *Roman citizens of Philippi*, a long way from Rome, living as *proud Roman citizens* in a *distant outpost of Rome*.

And that's *something like* what Paul is getting at when he writes: "*But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Far more important than our *New Zealand citizenship* is our *heavenly citizenship*, which is *why* the church is to be an *outpost of heaven* where *cruciform: faith, love, power and hope* are practiced while *eagerly awaiting our Saviour's return!*

Heavenly citizens stand firm in the Lord this way

5



Paul concludes this passage by writing:

"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!"

Standing firm 'this way' is the result of *everything* Paul's instructed them about *so far* in his letter. **5a**

The *essence* of which is found in the *cruciform pattern of Christ* narrated in the *Christ hymn* of *Philippians 2:6-11*, at the heart of his letter.

And right after the *Christ hymn*, Paul explains that: therefore *because* of what *Jesus* accomplished on the *cross*, *God* works in us, to will and to act according to his good purpose *conforming us* to the *cruciform pattern of Christ*.

In *so doing* we are "*co-markers*" of the cross,

pointing to where *Jesus* and the *kingdom of heaven* are found in the *outpost of heaven*, which is the *church!*

Back in *Philippians 1:27* Paul wrote a *summary statement* of what his letter is about:

"Whatever happens, as citizens of heaven, live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then whether I come and see you or not, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together with one accord for the faith of gospel."

The rest of his letter that we've looked at so far has been about how this *summary statement* is fulfilled by *living as imitators of Christ's pattern of cruciform: faith, love power and hope*.

And how by *living this way* we are able to *stand firm in the Lord*.

But *stand firm* against *what?*

Philippians 1:28 says:

'...without being frightened by those who oppose you.'

Then in chapter 3 verse 2 Paul *warns* against a group of *misguided Christian Jews* who preached a *false gospel of righteousness through works* instead of grace.

And in chapter 4 verse 2 Paul pleads for *Euodia and Syntyche* to be of the *same mind in the Lord*.

So Paul is showing the *Philippians* how to *stand firm* against *persecution*, against being *misled* by a *false gospel of works*, and against *internal division* from *conflict* between members in the church.

We looked at the *false gospel of works* last Sunday, and we'll be looking at how Paul deals with *Euodia & Syntyche's dispute* next time I preach.

But what about *standing firm* against those who *oppose you?*

We don't really encounter *much* in the way of *opposition* to Christianity here, other than perhaps *not being taken seriously* as a Christian or being *ignored*.

But there's *much worse* than that happening to Christians in *other parts of the world!*

Someone living much closer to where Christians are often persecuted is *Steff Christiansen*, a *Kiwi missionary* working in *Lebanon* with *SIM*. (You might remember her *speaking here* at the start of the year).

In her *last newsletter* she gave a *link to a song* written by a *Syrian woman* contemplating *what the Egyptian Christians martyred on the beach of Libya* last year, might have been thinking before they were *beheaded by Islamic extremists*.

Steff says she often plays this song *on repeat!*

As we *listen to the song* and *read* its beautiful words, let's *remember in silent prayer* the *persecuted Christians* in countries such as:

Libya, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Pakistan, India, China, North Korea, Indonesia, Nigeria, and other parts of the world.