

Week 10: Getting and keeping citizenship.

Objective: To understand the pattern for gaining citizenship and that citizenship must be maintained.

Focal Passage:

1. In Luke 14 Jesus tells the crowds to consider the cost of following Him. We must consider the cost of Kingdom citizenship. We have spent these last weeks discussing different characteristics of Citizenship. From the cost, the challenges, and the rewards, and many areas in between. As we have looked at those together the hope is that we are all spurred into action. That we become doers and not hearers only. That we are active in our Kingdom Citizenship.
 - a. We are left with two questions. First, how do we attain this citizenship, and second, how do we maintain it?
2. To be clear, the Bible doesn't explicitly lay out in unmistakable iron-clad language how one becomes a citizen. This is largely because it wasn't a question for the first-century church. Becoming a disciple of Christ was an understood concept. What we can do, however, is piece scriptures together and observe the examples found in Acts.
 - a. A common teaching in many Christian circles today, is a faith-exclusive method of becoming a disciple. Commonly expressed as "Faith alone in Christ alone" This stems out of reformation theology that was pushing against the rigid, empty practices of Catholicism. Proponents of this contend that Faith alone is all that is required for Kingdom citizenship. Despite good intentions, this teaching summarizes faith as an inward action of the heart only. It is belief only. The issue then is someone can internally believe something and never act on it. Faith is never used in this way biblically, further even the demons believe Jesus is Lord but that belief is empty. Biblically faith is understood as an inward belief that prompts outward action. In other words, true Faith encompasses the presence of both the inward belief and the outward action. This is the point James attempts to make when he clarifies a faith definition. See James 2: 14-26
 - b. I encourage you to examine the different conversion stories and notice a pattern that we call the plan of Salvation. Every encounter entails hearing, believing, confessing, repentance, baptism, and living out new citizenship. Notice the nature of this biblical pattern it encompasses the inward belief and then leads to inward and outward change. For our purposes today look at Acts 2 which of course is the story of Pentecost. The crowds heard Peter profess the gospel, they believed and confessed when they asked

what shall we do? Peter instructs them to repent and be baptized, and as we are told at the end of the chapter they walked in this new citizenship.

- i. Additional textual support for each though I would recommend the over-simplification. The reason is we are prone to reduce this to a check box situation which leads to a disingenuous approach. Citizenship is a relational life change not a check box addition to a person's existing life.
 - ii. Hear- Romans 10:17; Believe- Mark 16:16; Repent- Acts 2:38; Confess- Romans 10:9; Baptized- 1 Peter 3:21; Walk in new citizenship-Rev. 2:10
 - iii. Please also note these aren't the only supports for each part of the pattern Taking the whole counsel of God together we are left with a lifelong process of adopting citizenship on our way home.
 - c. Another mistake that can be made is to put an over-emphasis on any of the components in this pattern. In the Churches of Christ for example we often hyper-focus on baptism likely because of the over-emphasis on belief only. This too becomes problematic as a person who gets wet without an appeal to God is no more saved than a kid doing a cannonball into a pool. 1 Peter 3:21. Further damage can be done when we adopt a dunk them and move on to evangelism instead of adopting a posture of discipleship.
3. Our last question is one that in total transparency I wish we didn't have to ask but we do. The question is can you ever lose citizenship in the Kingdom? For some, the question comes because they worry about someone close to them or others. For others, it is a quest for assurance. Whatever the reason the question is asked it deserves proper consideration.
 - a. Popular teaching goes by the slogan once saved always saved meaning that citizenship is permanent and cannot be lost. And certainly, we can find passages in scripture to support such a position. Romans 8:31-39. The question then is does this fit into the whole counsel of God's word and life experience?
 - b. My estimation is no. Here is why. First, If someone who follows the pattern above and walks for years then rejects God completely has their free will overridden? Does God force them into His presence in eternity against their will? Certainly, He could but that seems out of character. Some might suggest that such a person was never really saved but if fruit evidence of salvation is there then one day it does not make that assertion rather weak. In addition to the logical considerations that stem out of experience, we have biblical verses that suggest Citizenship can be lost. Philippians 2:12; Hebrew 12:1-3, James 1:12, Revelation 2:10; Colossians 1:22-23

- c. So we are left with a puzzler. Passages seem to support God's faithfulness and ability to keep us in Him like Romans 8:31-39, but at the same time life seems to show us differently and passages seem to suggest that Kingdom citizenship can be lost. The answer that puts these passages at peace with each other is that we can have assurance because nothing can condemn us before God when we walk in the citizenship pattern above however God still sovereignly allows us to make another choice thus we need to persevere in our faith despite the worlds and Satan's attempts to knock us off the path set before citizens of the Kingdom. So short answer is citizenship is secure in the King's hands but He still honors your choices.
4. As we wrap up this series the pray is that you leave with a better understanding of your citizenship. That we are secure in confidently pledging our allegiance to the true King that we walk as His citizens first and foremost and that we share this hope with others.
- a. This week think and act on one area of citizenship you want to work on. Maybe it's remembering that God assures you, Maybe it's having faith like the children, or Maybe it's engaging in citizen transformation. Make an achievable plan and act.
 - b. Think about people in your life who don't know about this citizenship and make an effort to build the bridge to show them This Kingdom.
 - c. Pray this week that the citizenship truths permeate your heart as you are going about your life.