

SERMON – March 17 2019 – Lent 2

The Final Goal

Greeting: Grace and peace to you from God the Father and from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Friends in Christ, what is your goal in life, your main aim? What do you really want to achieve in your short time here on earth? I invite you to have those questions ticking away in your thinking as we look at Paul's inspired advice from God in Philippians.

Text: Philippians 3:20 *But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Listen again to Paul's words in verses 18-19 of our text today. *For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; "I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things."* Do you see and feel the depth of sorrow in his anguished words? Paul's lament corresponds with Jesus' own grief over God's chosen people because of their rejection of God's Word and refusal to listen to it, their refusal to listen to Him.

Yeah; but that was nearly 2000 years ago, how do Paul's worries relate to us today?

In searching for current day examples of Paul's words of advice for us, contained in his letter to the church at Philippi, I came across a link on Google that I think is worth sharing.

In an article on the Sydney Morning Herald website titled, "*Society is past its use by date*" the filmmaker Pria Viswalingam is interviewed about his film *Decadence: The Decline of the Western World*. I've never seen it, but the short overview I read says that the film focuses on the societal sickness in modern life: Individualism gone mad – that is, the focus on me, myself and I; the rise and prevalence of pornography; the demise of social equality in the widening gap between the haves and the have nots; disintegrating families and family values; the erosion and rejection of faith witnessed in emptying churches.

We can see for ourselves the escalation of addiction to anti-depressants and soaring suicide rates, the unquenchable growth of commercialism and materialism, and the Western World's obsessive devotion to money as the only true measure of worth. A symbol of all of this is the absurd, even obscene amount of money some people will splash on their wedding ceremony, or on a day at the horse races.

Oliver Yates, a merchant banker who contributed the bulk of the funds for Viswalingam's film said:

*"I believe that the new generation is struggling with society as they see it today. **They have a feeling that something is just not adding up but don't know what exactly it is and why.**"*

British author Alexander McCall Smith of 'The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency' fame, who came to the Opera House a few years ago to present a talk entitled *Society is Broken*, expands on Yates' line of thought:

*"People have been talking about the 'broken society' for some time now. [The British] riots demonstrated just how broken. The broken society is a consequence partly of social change and cultural change. The social change is familiar: the destruction of the family as the fundamental social unit would be fine if we had replaced it with something. We have not. [And] it's a culture in which we seem to have abandoned many of the values on which we based our civilisation. **We don't know what we believe in and are busy bringing up children who share our confusion.** We have created a strange culture perpetuated by television and other media that rejoices in and celebrates dysfunction, violence and anti-social behaviour."*

I think that it's telling that a filmmaker and author should use words like 'broken' and 'failing' to describe current Western civilization.

This is the message the Church has the privilege of proclaiming – not to condemn or judge people, because that is not our calling as Jesus' disciples – but to show them their **need** for their Saviour and the true life and peace that only He can give.

In today's Gospel recorded in Luke 13 we heard Jesus' lament over how hard-hearted God's own people were against His word, stoning the prophets who refused to compromise its truth by calling the people to repentance. For a really good example of this may I suggest that you read Jeremiah 8:9-13.

I ask you, is this what you want? As Christians, can we sit idly by and watch the world around us implode? Or do we join with Jeremiah, with St Paul and with Jesus Christ in their lament over the woes of the world?

In our text today, Paul says that he is *brought to tears* when those who say they are Christians live according to the way of the world. He says that by boasting of their sensuality and self-indulgence, feeding their pride and ego, they are distorting the Word of the Cross as the wisdom and the power of God to forgive – even sinners like you and me. Paul warns the Philippians—and us—to not go down that same path, for our sinful nature easily pulls us in that direction. So, Paul calls us to be joint-imitators of him as he imitated Jesus the Christ.

McCall Smith's observations that we don't know what we believe in and are busy bringing up children who share our confusion and the impact that this has on the stability of society, is profound. St Paul's solution is to live according to the pattern we gave you—that is, the teaching of the Apostles, and note those among you who are walking according to this pattern of teaching. In other words, be the Christians you already are - live distinctly from the enemies of the Cross and live according to Jesus' way.

Jesus' way and teaching which is filled with compassion, humility and service to others – filled with unconditional love –is to prepare us to reach our final goal, citizenship in heaven!

We may all be citizens of Australia, either by birth, or in some cases by naturalization. Our citizenship gives us rights and privileges that we should never take for granted or worse still, abuse. This also applies to our citizenship of God's kingdom which was given to us through Baptism.

Today we celebrate with Tom and Kristin as Archie was given this great gift of citizenship too.

In baptism, we are granted the faith to *renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways*, and pledge our loyalty to the Cross of Christ. Even when as infants our parents or care-givers speak on our behalf, we come under the authority of the risen Lord and His words which, together with the waters of Baptism, make us His. Through baptism you are freed to live as the redeemed people you are, so that the people of the world can say: "There's something good about living in the Commonwealth of Heaven that I want for myself too."

Sometimes, though, life can be unpredictable and even cruel. We see sadness throughout the world, our T.V. screens and Facebook feeds are over-crowded with reminders of this.

However; we citizens of Christ's kingdom, look at the world through the eyes of faith and long for an end to suffering and injustice and the rise of what seems to be 'evil let loose'!

Friends; Paul says today that there will be an end. There will be a destruction of all things evil, against God and His Word.

At times we are hit personally by trials and trauma in our own lives. We confront our limitations in sickness, injury and old age. We feel the pressures of the world's sinful ways all around us. We experience guilt when we look in the mirror of God's law that shows us that we constantly stuff-up in our thoughts, words and actions.

Let us humbly pray that God would give us the strength and courage to follow Christ, not just for the final goal of life eternal with Him, but also to obey His call to press on and finish the work He has set us.

We pray that the Holy Spirit would remind us that, in our baptism, we are citizens of heaven even though for a time we live as citizens of this place called earth.

As dual citizens – just don't tell the Australian parliament, okay? – we wait for our Saviour. Jesus the Christ *who will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead whose kingdom will have no end.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you are citizens of Heaven. When everything else in your life circumstances tempts you to doubt your standing before God, you **are still** citizens of Heaven.

Have a look at your baptism certificate, it proves that you have already achieved your **final goal** because you became a saint in God's Heavenly kingdom in your citizenship ceremony of Baptism. And when Christ your Saviour comes, He will *change you to be like Him* so that you will shine as His perfected people, and He will take you to be with Him in glory in the place He has promised.

Grant this Lord to us all:

Amen.