



Diane Christopher
Citizens of Two Kingdoms
Ephesians 2:19-22
July 5, 2015

I invite you to turn with me to our scripture passage this morning. A little background:

The first Christians were Jews. It was later that non-Jews or Gentiles became followers of Jesus. Since Jews historically did not associate with Gentiles, you can imagine it created tension when Jews and Gentiles came together for worship and fellowship. The Gentiles were feeling a bit left out. So Paul writes this section of scripture to the Gentile Christians.

Before we read what Paul says to the Gentile Christians, pray with me. Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen.

Read Ephesians 2:19-22

Paul is saying this: that Gentile Christians have the same privileges and rights as Jewish followers of Jesus. "You are no longer foreigners and strangers." They, too, are citizens in the same kingdom as God's people or the Jews. They, too, are a part of God's family. They, too, are a part of the holy Temple.

All of these are beautiful images of the church: fellow citizens, members of God's family, a holy Temple. These are all wonderful thoughts. However, since it is the 4th of July weekend, and we've been thinking about and celebrating our

independence as the United States, I am going to focus on only one of them: fellow citizens.

First of all, we are citizens of the United States of America. And before we go any further, I came across this crazy list (you know, the ones people send you by email) and it is called "Only in America."

1. Only in America can a pizza get to your house faster than an ambulance.
2. Only in America do drugstores make the sick walk all the way to the back of the store to get their prescriptions, while healthy people can buy cigarettes at the front.
3. Only in America do people order double cheeseburgers, large fries and a DIET coke.
4. Only in American do we buy hot dogs in packages of ten and buns in packages of eight.
5. And my personal favorite: Only in America do we leave cars worth thousands of dollars in the driveway and put our junk in the garage.

We are citizens of the United States of America. According to our scripture this morning, you are also citizens of another kingdom. When Jesus came here, His first public message was this: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Literally, this means the kingdom of God is available for access.

You are citizens of two kingdoms. One is an earthly kingdom and the other is a spiritual kingdom, and you serve both. There was a movie made in 1953 that addressed this issue of serving two kingdoms. It was called "The Robe" and is a story about the Roman soldier who nailed Jesus to the cross. In the movie, he eventually becomes a Christian, and at the end of the movie, he is put on trial for treason against the state of Rome.

The question is this: Can our hero serve two kings (Jesus and Caesar) and be loyal to both? According to our hero, he could; according to Caesar he could not. When our hero doesn't renounce his loyalty to Jesus (even though he states his loyalty to Rome), he is convicted of treason and sentenced to immediate death.

Well, in our day and age, we can serve both. What I want to do this morning is compare these two kingdoms that we serve.

We are going to look at three areas of comparison:

- The **requirements** for each of these kingdoms.
- Our **rights** as citizens of these kingdoms.
- Our **responsibilities** in these kingdoms.

What are the requirements to get into each of these kingdoms?

For the U.S., it's simple if your parents are citizens. If you are born here, you naturally become a citizen of the United States.

If you are a foreigner from another country and you want to become a citizen, you must go through a legal process.

You have to be 18.

You must be a lawful permanent resident for at least 5 years and physically present here at least half of that.

You are required to speak, read and write English.

You must pass an English test, a U.S. history test and a government test. (From what I understand, most Americans cannot pass these tests.)

You are interviewed followed by a swearing in ceremony where you take an oath of allegiance.

Then, you become a citizen of the United States. It's a lengthy process.

How do we become citizens of God's kingdom? Obey the 10 Commandments?

Actually, it is much easier than that.

Romans 10:9 says: [If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God rose him from the dead, you will be saved.](#)"

So, there are two steps to get into God's kingdom.

1. Believe who Jesus is and confess that with your mouth.
2. Believe that God raised Jesus from the dead.

That's it.

So, these are the requirements to get into these 2 kingdoms.

What are our rights in these two kingdoms?

A father was talking with his rather rebellious son one day and said, "Every person who lives in the United States is a privileged person."

The boy answered, "I disagree."

And the father replied, "That's the privilege."

Our rights as citizens of the US come from the Bill of Rights. We have these rights because of what our forefathers have done. You and I didn't earn the rights that we enjoy as citizens of this land. But I am thankful for those who did earn them and passed on to us. That is what we celebrate on the 4th of July.

We don't think about them our rights very often, so I will repeat some of them for you.

We have the freedom of religion.

The freedom of speech.

The freedom of press.

The right to peacefully assemble.

The right to keep and bear arms.

The right to be secure in our homes.

The right to a speedy and public trial and to have an attorney.

The right of a trial by jury.

The right to vote.

The freedom to travel from state to state and leave our country without government interference.

If you talk to people who travel overseas (and many of you have), the first thing you hear is how much they appreciate what we have as citizens of the US. I haven't traveled out of this country much, but I have one memorable experience.

I was scheduled to go to a church conference in San Diego with other people from my Madison, WI, church 2 weeks after 9/11. After much thought and prayer, they decided to go ahead with the conference. Some of my church members were afraid to fly but several of us decided to continue the trip.

We arrived a day early, so we decided to take a trolley to Mexico. Getting into Mexico was easy. Getting back into the United States during this time period was a different story. Taking a bus, we arrived at the international border and waited and waited and waited. Long lines of cars waited. Long lines of people waited. And with fresh thoughts of Sept 11 on our mind, we began to wonder if we were going to get back in to the United States.

Finally, we were asked to get off the bus. We were led into a building manned by military personnel, passed through X-ray machines, had our bags thoroughly checked, and then stand before a woman who asked us this question: What is your citizenship?

Now, you need to know that I tend not to be a flag waving person, but when I answered the woman's question with the United States, something profound happened to me. The first thought that came to my mind was, "This is home. This is where I belong." I was gone only 2 hours from the United States, but I couldn't wait to get back to my country. (Another woman I was with, apparently having the same thoughts, said she almost bent down and kissed the ground.)

We have much to be thankful for as citizens of the US.

What are our rights and privileges as citizens of God's kingdom?

Ephesians 1:3 ["Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realm with every spiritual blessing in Christ."](#)

I hope you understand and realize who you are and the great blessings and privileges that are lavished upon you as citizens of God's kingdom. We didn't earn them just as we didn't earn our rights here in the US, but they are given to us just because we are citizens of God's kingdom.

Verse 9 in our passage says: [You are members of God's household.](#)

Imagine God's kingdom as a house. You are led into the house, and you step into the door of the kingdom. The invitation is to go and explore what is yours.

Spiritually hungry? Walk into the kitchen. The Bible will satisfy your soul.

Lonely? Walk into the family room. You discover that you are now a member of a new family. You have been adopted by God. We are brothers and sisters in Christ.

Need guidance and knowledge? Go into the library. Discover you have the Holy Spirit within you, the one who leads you into truth and knowledge, guidance and counsel.

Go into the workshop. There are tools. You've been given a gift to do ministry. What will you make for God?

Tired? Go into the bedroom. God has given you His peace and rest.

Hooked up to the house is a telephone. Maybe even cell phones. Want to talk to someone? You now have access to God; it's called prayer.

Electricity surges through the house: God's power is available to you. This is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. We have something of God's splendor and God's power because we have free access to God as citizens of God's kingdom.

We are truly blessed as citizens of the United States. We are truly blessed as citizens of God's kingdom.

We have talked about the requirements to get into each of these kingdoms.

We have talked about our rights in each of these kingdoms.

What are our responsibilities in each of these kingdoms?

First, our responsibilities as citizens in the US:

We have the responsibility to vote.

The responsibility to obey the law of the land.

We have the responsibility to defend our nation.

We have the responsibility to represent our country and help others in the world.

If you travel overseas and meet people who have never met Americans, what they see and think of you is what they believe all Americans are like. Some people have good experiences with Americans, others not so much.

This is our responsibility as citizens of the United States – to represent our country in a manner worthy of our calling.

As believers, we have the responsibility to represent God's kingdom.

Ephesians 4:1 [As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.](#)

This is your reasonability as a citizen of God's kingdom: to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. In other words to live a life worthy of the One you represent and follow. The Bible says we are Christ's ambassadors.

I end with this story:

One Sunday a mother and her little girl were driving home from church. The little girl turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, there's something about the preacher's message this morning that I don't understand."

The mother said, "Oh? What is it?"

The little girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. He said God is so big that God could hold the world in His hands. Is that true?"

The mother replied, "Yes, that's true, honey."

"But Mommy, he also said that when we follow Jesus, God comes to live inside of us. Is that true, too?"

Again, the mother assured the little girl that what the pastor had said was true.

With a puzzled look on her face the little girl then asked, "If God is bigger than us and God lives in us, wouldn't God show through?"

May God shine through you as citizens of God's kingdom as you live in our earthly kingdom.

Amen.