

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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A Better Country!

We are living in an age and a country where opportunities for success are bountiful. America is the home of the brave and the free! The land of opportunity where the door to fame and fortune is opened to everyone who would but strive to enter. Yes friends, we live in a wonderful country. In fact, people from other countries are coming to our country because they want to live the American dream! They are in search of "a better country."

The Hebrew writer (Hebrews 11:1-16) lists some heroes of faith who we are told in verse 13, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." You and I are just like them! We are pilgrims and strangers on this earth. We have never passed this way before and there are many dangers and pitfalls that may come our way, but we, like them, must remain faithful! Notice what the writer of Hebrews says they were looking for in verse 16: "But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city." What is it about this "better country" that makes it better than the country they were in? Why did they desire it? Why do you? Let's notice some things about this better country:

1. It Is A Sinless Country. Its waters are pure, its skies are blue, there are no gray clouds of despair, the air is not polluted, and there is no darkness there! Sin does not plague mankind there for there is no sin, only holiness! Yes, it truly is a better country.

2. It Is A Healthy Country. There are no visits to the doctor, no medicine to take, no pain to cause suffering, no battles to win against our aging bodies! This is a place where all feel good and where all feel fine because there is no sadness or discouragement in this land! There is no sickness, and most of all, there is no death! For this is a healthy country where no tear or heartache resides. Yes, it truly is a better country.

3. It Is A Perfect Country. There are no imperfect beings living there! The Father is perfect, as is the Son! One will not find bitterness, sorrow, anger, envy, or hatred, nor will one find

an evil heart or an evil tongue for such things will not be found in this land! The inhabitants of this country are pure and holy and righteous. Yes, it truly is a better country.

I want you to notice what we are told about these great heroes of faith. It doesn't say in verse 16 that they merely thought about this country, nor does it say that they only dreamed about this country! The Holy Spirit through this writer says they "desire" a better country! When one desires something they are willing to do whatever it takes to achieve it no matter the cost.

We are told in verse 13 that they all died in faith! How is it that they all died in faith? Were they merely the lucky ones? I believe the reason that they all died in faith is answered for us in verse 16! They had a "desire." This word "desire," according to W.E. Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words, is *orego* which means "to reach or stretch out, is used only in the middle voice, signifying the mental effort of stretching oneself out for a thing, of longing after it, with stress upon the object desired." Their desire was to go to the New Jerusalem, the City of God, Heaven, and because of that desire they lived in such a way that was pleasing to God! They obeyed the Lord while walking through this country and the result was they received a better country.

I, like them, am looking for this country too! I know it's there because verse 16 tells me that God prepared for them a city! If he prepared it for them I know that it's prepared for me also because my God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). Jesus in fact stated: "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:1-2).

Some of my loved ones are in that better country now! I look forward to seeing them when I get there!

- Rufus R. Clifford III

Profile of the Kingdom Citizen!

Glancing over the three chapters of Matthew that record the Sermon on the Mount brings to remembrance the profile of a kingdom citizen, one whose "citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20). We should do this often to insure that we maintain focus on the profile of Jesus Christ whom we are desiring to imitate (1 Corinthians 11:1). Many have been surprised to learn that the citizen of the kingdom, the disciple of Christ, is poor in spirit, mourns over sins, is meek (gentle, yet with a compensating strength), hungers for righteousness, shows mercy as a peacemaker, pure in heart, and joyful when

contemplating a heavenly reward. The kingdom citizen suffers injustice from men because he stands up for righteousness and the truth of God. He condemns sin wherever it is found, showing no partiality as he works what is good and strives to be righteous. He knows that serving others is the Lord's path to greatness. He guards his heart and works for reconciliation with others whenever the situation requires it.

The kingdom citizen lives by God's marriage laws. He is honest; his word is his bond. He loves his enemies, not in word only, but in deeds. He is generous, but not showy. In prayer and giving his motives are based in God, not what others see or think. He does not let materialism or anxiety destroy his spirituality. Maintaining his citizenship takes priority over everything else. He is level-headed and just, regarding others above himself. He is humble, but watchful since many false prophets have gone out into the world. The kingdom citizen obeys the commands of the King and his citizenship is sealed on that basis. He is a true servant of the Eternal King!

With these characteristics fully understood, it becomes clear that there are many people, even religious people who know some Scripture, who are not fit for the kingdom. There may even be someone who sits in the pew across the aisle that is self-righteous, filled with pride, and concerned primarily for himself (cf. 2 Timothy 3:2). He may have absolutely no interest in restoring relationships with anyone he has alienated (cf. Matthew 5:24). Peacemaker is the last name he would be called. Does he love God? It may appear that he does, he makes sure of that, but in truth, he does not. He is not suitable for citizenship in the kingdom of God. (1 John 4:7-8).

Paul wrote,

"For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

People have a choice to make: do I want to be great in the sight of men, or of God? (See Galatians 1:10.) Heaven's true wisdom demands that we reject the world's appraisal of greatness. Adopting what the world thinks is important, one will find himself hating the things that are of God. In the wisdom of God we find "righteousness and sanctification,

and redemption" in Christ. We must appraise greatness in the same way that the Lord did.

The light that Jesus brought to the earth was rejected by worldly-wise people who repudiated it, judging themselves "unworthy of eternal life" (Acts 13:46). Jesus offered light in kingdom citizenship, but "men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil." (John 3:19). If we are not careful, we can follow the same pattern of disbelief and rejection. In so doing, as lovers of darkness and doers of evil, we will be refused citizenship in the kingdom.

- Gary Smalley

* "The measure of a man's real character is what he would do if he knew he would never be found out!"

* "The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible!"

* "Some people, like tea, never know their real strength until they get into hot water!"

* "Pride is to character what the attic is to the house — the highest part and generally the most empty!"

* "He knew the Book from A to Z; his mind had mastered every part. A fine achievement, but alas . . . it never got into his heart!"

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)