



## 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

TITLE

JOHN MACKINTOSH SQUARE > GOVERNMENT HOUSE > ZEBRA CROSSING

No, I'm not suggesting that Gibraltar is an outpost of heaven! But it is an outpost of Britain in the south of Spain. Going there is a weird experience. As you drive in you know you are still in the Mediterranean. But things start to look different. Yes the town has a Mediterranean look but it's British. The Gibraltar Government is proud that their territory is more British than Britain and they make that conspicuously obvious!

There isn't one official sign that isn't in English except where there are tourist attractions. Everybody in Gib can speak Spanish fluently, yet you'll be pushed to hear one word uttered in public. They use the £, many of the high street shops are British chains and the rest are the same curious mix of little shops you find in Felixstowe and definitely not like Spain. They've even got a Morrisons. You won't find any shortage of pictures of the Queen either. The main road from the border is Winston Churchill Avenue. It's like travelling through Portsmouth or Plymouth but with far more yuccas and palms!

So in just the space of an airport runway one moves from Spain into Britain. Except it isn't Britain – just an outpost. On to a tableau that is Spanish, the inhabitants of Gibraltar have created a little piece of Britain. Britain may be 2000 miles away but they've made it as much like Britain as they are able – even if they drive on the other side of the road, the only UK territory to do so!

Despite the official disapproval of the Spanish Government, the actual relationships with the Spanish people is good. There is a regular stream of Spanish workers and tourists who experience a little taste of Britain – and the tax-free shopping! What's that got to do with heaven? Quite a lot.

In the last few sermons we have looked at what heaven is like and apart from finding that it's wonder and beauty defies description, what it tells us is how precious we are to God if we are in Christ. We found that in John's experience of heaven there was a message about the promise of glory that was ours, the fact that the Holy Spirit empowers us, that we speak and live under the authority of God and that as we understand what He's like we give Him worship. We were given that message because all that stuff isn't just for when we get to glory, but given for us to live now.

For us heaven isn't meant to be a future aspiration but something that breaks into the now and should be to an extent a reality now. We are outposts of heaven. Church is an outpost of heaven.

How can and should that happen?

WE HAVE NEW STANDARDS

*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

In Christ we have been made into new people – we are new creations. We've changed and we therefore shouldn't think and operate like the world. To use some verses we had recently in our Colossians series – VERSE 3:1 *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

We're more than just made alive, we're citizens of heaven.

VERSE Phil 3:20 *We, however, are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly wait for our Saviour, the Lord*

*Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. 21 He will change our weak mortal bodies and make them like his own glorious body, using that power by which he is able to bring all things under his rule.*

Here's another VERSE

*Eph 2:19 So then, you Gentiles are not foreigners or strangers any longer; you are now citizens together with God's people and members of the family of God.*

And we await Jesus, we await being changed, we await for Him to change us. And where is His Kingdom. Let's look at John 18 to start with. VERSE

*John 18:36 Jesus said, "My kingdom does not belong to this world; if my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. No, my kingdom does not belong here!"*

We are citizens of heaven, walking a foreign land. And we await being part of that glorious kingdom and over the past few months I've tried to increase our expectation of what God has prepared for us.

But His kingdom isn't a future one. Look at these VERSES:

*Rev 1:5 He loves us, and by his sacrificial death he has freed us from our sins 6 and made us a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father. To Jesus Christ be the glory and power forever and ever! Amen.*

We represent His Kingdom, His rule yet we are in a foreign land. We are outposts of that kingdom.

That isn't only as individuals but as the church – the body of Christ, the people of God. There's a verse that Christians discuss the meaning of that gives us the connection between the church and the kingdom of God.

VERSE Matt 16:18 *And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven."*

Paul gives us the same idea.

VERSE Col 1:13 *He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son, 14 by whom we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven.*

Yes, heaven is a certain future but His kingdom exists now. We are safe in the kingdom of His dear Son. Note: kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven are usually used relatively interchangeably in the NT.

But where is that kingdom. Well it's in heaven but it's somewhere else too.

VERSE Luke 17:20 *Some Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come. His answer was, "The Kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be seen. 21 No one will say, "Look, here it is!" or, "There it is!"; because the Kingdom of God is within you."*

The kingdom of God is within you. We are in this world and the kingdom of God isn't territory, it's in whoever He reigns. So He reigns in our lives if we know Him. And he reigns in His church.

Or He should do. Look at this VERSE

*1 Thess 2:12 We encouraged you, we comforted you, and we kept urging you to live the kind of life that pleases God, who calls you to share in his own Kingdom and glory.*

Our lives and our church should be a reflection of what heaven is like. We are an outpost of heaven! The territory may be this world, but the look and feel should be heaven. Remember Gibraltar. It's physically connected to Spain a long way from Britain, but it's look and feel is of another kingdom – and the inhabitants have made it so. We are an outpost of heaven!

Church being like heaven? Really! The experience many people have of church is so much like the world - and that's just Christians. What does the world think we are like? And who's fault is that?

Yet what we learned last week is that God had given us everything in Christ to make our lives and our church a little piece of heaven. Anyone involved should find it a place of peace, uplift, worship. If it's not that then we need to repent and submit ourselves to the God who can make that change in us so that we are truly an outpost of heaven.

## WE HAVE A NEW MESSAGE

So far I've talked about church but Paul points out that His message is one of reconciliation: VERSE *that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.* The table in front of us this morning speaks that same message. That message is our message. Our outpost of heaven should be a place that attracts others to find and have what we've got.

I mentioned earlier that Gibraltar is a honeypot for Spanish visitors. In fact a large proportion of the population is of Spanish descent. There are few of British descent as a proportion of the population. They came, they stayed because they liked the lifestyle and culture – and its business opportunities!

If we are an outpost of heaven, then people should find the reconciliation that God offers in Christ. That should be what we spread to the world beyond, that's what we should be about. Apart from the word of God saying it here, we know that the message of reconciliation in Christ is central to what we stand for as an outpost of heaven because we have just enacted that reconciliation as we have remembered the broken body and shed blood of Jesus this morning.

## WE HAVE A NEW MISSION

VERSE *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*

What does an ambassador do? Represents his or her country. In fact your average British embassy is also regarded as British soil – an outpost of Britain. B E IN MOSCOW

In it you'll find everything British and outside too by the look of the photo.

We represent Jesus, not just when we meet as church, but day by day as we walk with Him. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

*Col 1:27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

That is our message to the world. We are to be what we are - outposts of heaven. We should attract people by our lives and lifestyle. Even more it should mean that we can share our message of reconciliation, of righteousness, of salvation and of heaven to others.

We usher in God's kingdom

LP - *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on Earth as in Heaven.*

Our desire should be to advance God's kingdom. I know some pray for revival regularly. Good – we should. But how does revival start? Because we are healthy outposts of heaven. Healthy in our lives, healthy in our prayers, healthy in our worship, healthy in our desire to bring God's reconciliation in Christ to others.

Not heaven? Then we need to come in repentance – we already know from past weeks that God gives us power by His Spirit to make that change effective in us

Prayer

Send revival, start with me.

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