

Dual Citizens

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“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it, we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” | Philippians 3:20-21, ESV

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” | Mark 12:17, ESV

I was born and raised in New Zealand, the land of the long white cloud and a ratio of nearly six sheep for every one person. I often remember as a child watching the sun in summer sink below the horizon late at night, and, in winter, layering up as warmly as possible through the short, dark, freezing days of relentless rain and oftentimes snow.

My husband and I moved from New Zealand in 2008, the year our youngest child was born, and we settled in the beautiful Northern Rivers region on the east coast of Australia. We have lived here now for nearly 14 years (this month, in fact) and, even though New Zealand will always be ‘home’, Australia now feels like home too.

So, it felt more than overdue that I and our three children became Australian citizens and, during this past year, we did just that, an event that, frankly, I didn’t expect to feel quite so much emotion over.

As I took my pledge and officially became an Australian citizen, I realised there is nothing quite like the feeling of belonging, of becoming a part of the whole, of finally being a bona fide member of a community. Being able to *properly* call myself an Australian was a feeling of joy and welcome I hadn’t

quite expected.

I've never really given the concept of citizenship much thought in the past. As a New Zealander, my citizenship was something I was born with; all its rights and responsibilities intrinsically held simply by virtue of my birth in that country.

Yet applying for citizenship in another country was a different matter altogether. This was a choice, a conscious intention on my part to assimilate with the country and its people. I would be required to understand the nature and values of the country to which I wished to belong.

I would be asked to commit to contributing to and participating in the community. Together with the privileges and advantages that would come with my new status, there were also rights and responsibilities I would pledge to uphold.

This experience and the process of applying for and being accepted as a citizen of Australia turned my thoughts towards citizenship of a more serious and spiritual kind; that of our status, as Christians, as citizens of the kingdom of God.

Adam's Country

We're all, by birth, citizens of an altogether different country, Adam's country, born deep in the darkness of the kingdom of men. Adam's country is one in which we are both spiritually dead and physically aging; bound by mortality on a one-way, downhill journey from cradle to grave.

Death is not just the enemy of life itself but also thwarts the purpose for which humanity was created. Even the smartest, wealthiest, or most influential men and women soon pass from the world's stage, their personalities and achievements more often than not fading from memory.

In Adam's country, humans invariably live for their own

purposes and intents, rather than the higher calling for which God created us. As the world rapidly moves towards an increasingly secularised society, much of what we now see around us is just a shallow and warped reflection of the heart of our Creator, the One in whose image we were originally made.

Adam's country is one that is corrupted by greed, injustice, and selfishness. Inequity is rife; and more often than not, the rich simply get richer and the poor get poorer. It's estimated that in 2022, around 689 million people live in extreme poverty (on less than \$1.90 a day). One of the most striking examples of the unequal distribution of resources on the planet is the existence of chronic hunger in many parts of the world.

Our stewardship of the earth and its resources has been negligent at best and grossly egocentric at worst. The land has long been mismanaged and polluted, with toxic chemicals sprayed on crops and then making their way into the rivers and lakes.

Extensive farming and deforestation have destroyed the habitats of many species of wildlife causing a shocking decline in their numbers or even extinction. It's estimated that we've single-handedly managed to send over 900 species extinct since 1500, with over 40,084 species (across all taxonomic groups) thought to be threatened with extinction (estimated in 2021).

This is the country that, as humans, we're all born into, participants in the global species we call *Homo Sapiens*, the *kingdom of men*. This is the reality of what it means to be *human*.

(Yet even in this *kingdom of men*, God is still working, setting up whomsoever He will, and one day, we know the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and

Messiah (Revelation 11:15).

Heaven's Country

When we become Christians, we don't stop being *human*, but we're well on our way to becoming a *new kind of human*. Made spiritually alive in Christ, God sends His Spirit into our hearts as both a seal and promise of His commitment to renew and transform us. We continue to live *in the world* but we're no longer *of it* in quite the same way, belonging now to Heaven's country.

Heaven's country is one that is full of love, justice, and glory. It's one of abundance, flourishing, and life everlasting. The One who rules over it is perfect, all-wise, and completely righteous, and He intends to restore and renew this world and its inhabitants, filling it with His glory and majesty.

When Heaven's country finally comes to earth, there will be no more tears, neither crying, suffering, or pain, for God will have made all things new. This is where our citizenship is now held and this is where our Saviour will appear from, carrying, as it were, our citizenship card with him.

I read the following commentary (below) at the time I was applying for Australian citizenship and it seemed to me an accurate analogy of the spiritual reality that occurs for anyone who becomes a Christian:

"In the citizenship pledge, Australian citizens pledge their loyalty to Australia and its people. Australian citizens may also hold the citizenship of another country or countries if the laws of those countries allow. This is known as dual, or multiple, citizenship. However, even if a person is also a citizen of another country, an Australian citizen within Australia must follow all Australian laws at all times. Some Australian laws must also be followed by Australian citizens

even when they are overseas.” – [Australian Department of Immigration](#)

Our spiritual reality now becomes our primary allegiance. We have become dual citizens; still human, and living and belonging, to some degree, to Adam’s country but now also not *just human*, more specifically, now *a different kind of human*, a citizen of Heaven, with all the responsibilities and privileges that are afforded us as children of God.

Paul the Apostle describes this strange state of dual citizenship in this way:

“For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” | 2 Corinthians 5:1-5, ESV

We’re still living in the *here-and-now*; we experience the routine, mundane, messy reality of ordinary human existence, but we’re also living in hope and expectation of the *soon-to-be*; mortality swallowed up by life and our earthy existence completely renewed and transformed, as the privilege of our heavenly citizenship degrees. God’s Spirit, present and active in our hearts and lives, assures us of this truth.

Render Unto Caesar

It’s often a difficult tension to navigate, the halfway space between *here* and *there*. How, in practical terms, do we ensure our primary allegiance as people who look for a city whose

builder and maker is God?

Yet how are we also to be salt and light, to fulfill our Christian commission, among the communities and people with whom we live and work? How *exactly* are we to be in the world but not of it?

Jesus addresses the reality of the tension of Christian citizenship existing alongside the commission given to Christians in John 17.

"I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one...I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." | John 17:9, 11, 15-18, ESV

He doesn't pray that Christians are removed from the world, but rather that they are protected from the evil one. He then seems to give a summary of the relationship that exists between Christianity, secular government, and society in Mark 12:17 where he comments, *"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's"*.

Our responsibilities, as citizens of Adam's country, remain, even after we become Christians, and, as the early church had clearly understood, Christians are to be model citizens in the countries in which they live, showing respect to all people, including those in authority ([1 Peter 2:13](#)).

As Christians, we recognise that *"...there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God"* (Romans 13:1). Therefore, *respect authority, pay your taxes, don't engage in*

illegal behaviours, be law-abiding citizens, pray for those who have the rule over you.

But we also need to remember that our primary citizenship is now a heavenly one. Our allegiance has been given to Jesus, the king, and our commission from him is to be salt and light in the world.

Christians need to be aware that we are not attempting to patch and repair the kingdom of this world, Adam's country, by our continued involvement or participation in it. Like a religious system built on faulty foundations, the entire structure of Adam's country must be dismantled, and be replaced by something far superior (Heaven's country).

Rather, we are to point the world to a far better kingdom and to the just and righteous king who rules over it. We are people of the new heavens and the new earth and we long, with all of creation, to see this finally become the reality in all the world.

We aren't improving the kingdom of this world, we are bringing the kingdom of God into its midst, and we do this most effectively and faithfully together through the reality of the local church.

"In one simple sentence: what Christians want for the nation should first be a witnessed reality in their local church." | Scot McKnight

The Radical Mission Of The Church

The radical mission of the church is this: *First we are to seek peace in our local fellowship, to end strife, and to seek reconciliation with God and with one another. Out of this peace-shaped, kingdom-shaped church we spill over peace into the world* (Scot McKnight).

The church, where you will find the citizens of Heaven's country, will glow with the redeeming love of Jesus, demonstrating this love both inside and outside the church through [*kingdom mission*](#).

In the world but no longer of it in quite the same way, we, the church, must navigate with care and wisdom the duality of our existence; rendering the appropriate dues to the Caesars of our world, but never to the point of collusion, knowing we no longer serve this world's king.

Whatever we do is now in service to God and becomes the sacred vocation of our heavenly citizenship. *"The hope for the world is the local church, and that the heart of God's plan is found in creating a whole new society in a local church"* (Scot Mcknight).

Our mission is not secular but spiritual, and this guiding principle will help us navigate the decisions and choices we need to make on a daily basis as *dual citizens*.

God's church exists not for itself but for the benefit of those who are not yet members. . . . [and] the church which lives for itself will be sure to die by itself." The church is not a religious club and it does not have a secular mission. Instead, it is a worshipping and sending community.
| Michael Green

By faith, he [Abraham] dwelt in the promised land as a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." | Hebrews 11:10, ESV

Beneath The Skin

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

What's beneath the skin of our collective Christian identity?

Has Christianity lost touch with its original radical and beating heart? Are we so enamored with the power and prestige of this present world that we have forgotten our own history?

Are we, the church, so entertained by the lights and sounds, by the choreographed music, by the dimly lit stages and almond-milk-lattes-after-service that we've forgotten the ancient truths our early Christian brethren lived and died for?

Have we become mere spectators to our own Christian faith?

The Birth Of 'The Jesus Movement'

The modern western church lives a comfortable existence. She wants for nothing.

With both resources and freedom in worship and expression of faith, the church looks remarkably different today than she did in her fraught, early days. Birthed during the reign of Tiberius Caesar Augustus (14 AD – 37 AD), "the Jesus movement" initially attracted little attention from the Romans; assumed to be merely an offshoot of Judaism. Yet it soon became clear that this movement was more than a Judaistic sidenote, that it could not be contained nor extinguished and that it threatened the authority of Caesar himself.

Christians everywhere preached the news of Jesus, not just as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, but as Lord, Saviour, and

King; over and above Caesar. Unlike the Jewish community, who lived and worshipped largely by themselves, Christians were active evangelists, eager to share the good news about Jesus with all who would listen.

The first century was a spiritual explosion; fueled by the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The preaching of the gospel found its most fruitful response amongst Gentiles – pagans – who would have formerly given allegiance to Caesar and embraced a belief in many deities. Now, these new converts rejected their pagan gods and confessed belief in one God – the God of Israel, giving their allegiance to Jesus, His appointed Saviour and designated King. They were convinced by the witnesses who spoke boldly of Jesus' resurrection, particularly the compelling evidence of men like Paul the Apostle, also later called '*the apostle to the Gentiles*', who had seen the risen Christ for himself.

People responded, literally, in their thousands, and Rome realised it had a real problem on its hands.

"By the end of the second century, the new faith was on its way to becoming the most forceful and compelling movement within the empire." (Bruce L Shelley)

By simply living in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, giving him their allegiance, they had effectively rejected Caesar, a pagan ruler, and broken from the tradition of emperor worship.

This worship of the emperor, which, by AD249 had been made universal and compulsory for every nation in the Roman Empire, was primarily a test of political loyalty. Those who would not swear allegiance to Caesar and acknowledge him and each successor to the title with the words "Lord of the Earth, Invincible Power, Glory, Honour, Blessed, Great, Worthy Art Thou To Inherit The Kingdom." were branded revolutionaries and

traitors of the empire.

The Spread Of Faith And Conviction

Had the Christians been willing to simply formally verbalise that 'Caesar is Lord', they could have continued worshipping Jesus as much as they wanted...but the Christians would not compromise.

What was beneath the skin?

There are several reasons that the Christian faith experienced such a remarkable spread, despite persecution.

Firstly, the witnesses to the resurrection were clearly possessed by a burning, unshakeable conviction as to the reality of who Jesus was and what had been accomplished in his death and resurrection. They knew that this good news had the power to transform the lives of men and women, that finally humanity had been redeemed, and that they themselves were the recipients of immeasurable grace. They simply could not keep the news to themselves and their unswerving belief, despite every obstacle (including the threat of death or actual death) could not deter them.

Secondly, the practical outworking of the Christian faith, demonstrated in acts of love, was astonishing and quite unheard of in Roman times. It was their most defining feature, remarked upon by the pagans with grudging admiration.

It found its expression in care for the poor, widows and orphans, for those brethren who had been imprisoned or condemned, and particularly for brethren, who due to poverty, could not afford an honourable burial. The early church would often provide services for such persons, believing care in death as well as life was an active expression of love for those made in the image of God.

"Atheism (ie the Christian faith) has been specially advanced

through the loving service rendered to strangers and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar and that the godless Galileans' care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them" | Emperor Julian, (332-63)

As Jesus had promised, by demonstrating this kind of love, sacrificial and all-encompassing, all people knew that these believers were part of 'the Jesus movement'. Just as *they* had been loved, they now displayed that same kind of love for each other and others, proving without a doubt that they were disciples of the Christ.

The Price Of Prestige

The early church flourished as a separate identity from the empire for a brief few centuries, with the struggle between Christian worship and Caesar worship defining the first 300 years of church history. Many martyrs went to their deaths, refusing to recant their faith in Jesus and give allegiance to Caesar.

Yet the church was to face a far more insidious threat in the centuries that followed; more dangerous than persecution, poverty or martyrdom. Power and prestige came to the church in the form of open favour from Rome's pagan Emperor, Constantine.

Formerly outlawed and persecuted, the Christian church now experienced a sudden reversal in fortune. But Constantine, represented as the ideal Christian ruler and ushering in a new age of salvation for the church, still retained much of his pagan origins.

What was beneath the skin?

The advantages for the church were real enough but there was a price to pay. Constantine ruled Christian bishops as he did his civil servants and demanded unconditional obedience to official pronouncements, even when they interfered with purely church matters. There were also masses that now streamed into the officially favoured church. Prior to Constantine's conversion, the church consisted of convinced believers. Now many came who were politically ambitious, religiously disinterested and still half-rooted in paganism. This threatened to produce not only shallowness and permeation by pagan superstitions but also the secularisation and misuse of religion for political purposes." | Bruce L Shelley

Did the church ever recover from this melding of state and faith, this union of empire and religion? Did she ever break loose from the seductive grasp of the pagan Caesar, no longer enemy, but sponsor and friend, and return to her first love?

Did she find again the burning conviction that Jesus alone was Lord and King over all the earth and her allegiance was to him?

At times, perhaps.

But, equally, at times, she has colluded with the powers of this world, exchanging her birthright for what amounted to a mess of pottage.

She has had, in many stages of her historical past, a reputation of being alive but *beneath the skin*, she was dying. "Wake up", her Lord and King has implored *"and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God."*

Faithful individuals remained; arguably, the heart and soul of the church herself, but often enough, the official church sacrificed such individuals in order to appease the empire, in

order to maintain control, to the detriment of humanity's salvation.

What lay beneath the skin?

The Church Of Our Times

What of the church today?

What lies beneath her skin?

Behind the powerful vocals from a vast and blue-lit stage, beneath the skinny jeans with tastefully ripped knees, between the cleverly worded messages from the pulpit, is there still a radical and beating heart?

After asking Jesus into their hearts, do Christians still ask Jesus into their lives? The church may profess to still love Jesus *but would she die for him?*

Still. In every time and in every place, there has always been a movement, a people; the invisible church. A generation that does not lose hope in the church it sees but instead endeavours to become the church it dreams of.

As in times past, the message of good news continues to be enacted in the lives of ordinary people and in circumstances that are familiar and relatable to us all; stories of mothers and fathers, children and parents, wealthy people, and those in poverty, in bustling market places and domestic households. This collective community of faith – the church – will look different throughout time and throughout culture, yet the ancient truths remain embedded within the lives of those faithful to the message of good news.

The skin is just the outward appearance. How the church has looked, from the outside, has changed many times during the centuries. Her skin is unimportant.

But what lies *beneath the skin* is vitally important. Is there

more to the church today than simply a hip social media account or a buzzing Sunday service? Is there an emphasis on substance over reputation? Is she still to be found among the simple, the humble, those deemed by this world to be foolish and irrelevant?

Or does the church sit alongside the culture of celebrity and, in an age of consumer-driven interests, is she more engrossed in giving people what they *want* rather than what they *need*.

The early believers weren't just Sunday Christians, whose most active participation in their Christian faith was simply attending a weekly service. They didn't just turn up for one hour in the week; they shared their entire lives with each other, week in and week out.

They didn't *go to church*, they *were church*.

They ate and worshipped together, they divided their resources and distributed to whoever had need. They "*ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people*". They evangelised and disciplined, their conviction deeply rooted in and flowing from this focused centre; that "*one man died for everyone*." They knew that what this meant for humanity was dramatic and life-changing; effectively turning the world upside down.

Believers were added to their fellowship through baptism, "*buried with Jesus into death*", and bound together in unity through communion, Jesus' "*death and resurrection*". They became people of the kingdom, joined together in the fellowship of the King, the risen Christ, whose kingdom is over and above all other powers in this world.

Beneath The Skin

It's imperative for the church as she now progresses into the 21st century that she reclaims this identity and the authority that is deeply rooted in and connected to Jesus, her risen

king. It's vital that Jesus is truly first in her affections and that his will and sovereign rule supersedes all. It's crucial that she rediscovers the transforming power that gave her life and empowers her still.

Beneath her skin, there must be a depth to her character, a sense of resourcefulness and humility, sacrifice and love. She must resolve to *authentically and completely* represent Jesus to the world, not just the parts of him that are palatable. She won't be satisfied to merely speak *of Jesus* but be compelled to lead humanity *to him*, to not just sing *of Jesus* but to baptise and disciple *in his name*. Strength and dignity are the garments she chooses to clothe herself with, and wisdom and kindness the teachings that spring from her lips.

Her form is unimportant: she knows that outward beauty can be deceitful and that it is the heart of her, the burning devotion and the fearless and uncompromising intention to live according to the teachings of Jesus, that will cause praise to rise up to God in Heaven.

The greatest hope for the church in our time and place is that we will see a passionate and stirring revival. That Christians, no matter their denomination or creed, will be emboldened to return to the foot of the cross and give their lives anew to the resurrected king. That collectively, we, the church, the 'woman of valour' for whom he died, will shine brightly in a darkened and impoverished world through our most basic and guiding principle: that is, to incarnate Christ.

That *beneath our collective skin* is a radical and beating heart still.

"So come, move, let justice roll on like a river; let worship turn into revival. Lord, lead us back to you." | insp. Amos 5:24