

Dual Citizens

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

“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

Beyond The Pale

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

“By the 14th century, the Norman invasion of Ireland was struggling. Too many Normans had “gone native”, assimilated into Irish life. The remaining settlers had retreated to just four eastern counties: Louth, Meath, Dublin, and Kildare. These four “obedient shires” were the only part of Ireland still under the control of the English crown. The king’s perimeter was marked with wooden fence posts pounded into the Irish turf. These were called “pales,” from the Latin palus, meaning “stake.”

Over the following centuries, the English settlement fortified its boundaries by turning the fenceline into an impressive barrier: a ten-foot-deep ditch surrounded by eight-foot banks on each side and ringed by a thorny hedge. These ramparts were never meant to be an impregnable wall, but they did provide a daunting obstacle to raiders stealing across the borders for English cattle. Within the Pale ditch, settlers lived under the protection of the crown. But once you passed “the Pale,” you were outside the authority and safety of English law, and subject to all the savageries of [rural Ireland](#). “Beyond the pale” then became a colloquial phrase meaning “outside the limits of acceptable behaviour or judgment.” | [C N Traveler](#)

I [recently wrote about my separation from](#) the religious community I grew up in and the overwhelming response to my article was both encouraging and thought-provoking.

Many people wrote to me, both publicly and privately, to let

me know that the article had deeply resonated with them. They expressed that they, too, have had many questions over the years, wrestling with inconsistencies while attempting to find their place in a system they secretly suspected they didn't fit.

Not many people feel free to speak publicly of their reservations or doubts and I understand this fear and hesitancy. They want to avoid similar censure and they know the penalty for dissenting is potentially severe; loss of relationship, rejection, and ostracisation.

Many also wrote expressing their distress at my experience (regardless of whether it had been theirs or not) and offering their blessing on my continued journey. I deeply appreciated their warmth, kindness, and understanding.

Others expressed dismay that I was no longer part of the community; how would I receive *nurture and support*? With whom would I now *fellowship*? Couldn't I have just stayed to *change the culture*? Beneath their words there seemed the suggestion of a more serious question; wasn't this just the beginning of a descent into loss of faith and the inevitable and eventual drift from God?

Others were less complimentary with their feedback. My article was deemed to be slanderous and inaccurate, and I, the author, simply a narcissistic, bitter ex-member, obsessed, while I was "in", about my 'rights' being impinged upon or 'the (annoying) call of true discipleship interfering with my personal life'.

Now that I was "out", I was simply an aggressive and confrontational vandal, looking to break something with whatever stones I could throw.

My 'questions' were excuses, and, they implied, I ought to be cancelled.

While I thought a lot about the people for whom this article

resonated, and I deeply appreciated that they had shared their thoughts with me, I thought more about the other two kinds of responses.

Firstly, I wondered about those who had simply dismissed me and what I had to say. I pondered the mentality that refused to acknowledge any part of my experience as valid, believable, or worthy of discussion.

I wondered at the psychology that would paint me as the intolerant troublemaker rather than the wounded truth-teller.

And I wondered at such blind certainty of their supposed privileged position and their categorical dismissal that God could legitimately be found anywhere outside their own walls. Their confirmation bias was on full display by the way in which they chose to interpret and respond to my narrative.

I thought, secondly, about those who now considered me beyond the pale, out beyond the protection and comfort of the only community that was able to provide such things. Blessings and opportunities galore had been mine for the taking, had I only just remained within the palisade walls. No such blessings or opportunities (or if there were some to be found, they would be few and far between), awaited me outside those walls.

No one survives out there, they seemed to be whispering to one another. She'll die, for sure.

Well, I didn't die.

It hasn't been an easy journey, I'll not pretend otherwise, but outside those walls is not the wilderness you might imagine it to be. I'd been told that there was nothing worthwhile out there, but I discovered those are simply the words of fearful men, hemmed in by their own definitions and not living free in the Spirit of Christ.

God is out there. He is everywhere, and the more you listen

for Him, the clearer He speaks. He is with us always, even when it feels like we're wandering through a wilderness, even if we're walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

Beyond the pale, I found men and women, fellow Christians, who deeply love Jesus and are committed to following him. I found people who are not afraid of difference but are compelled by the love of Christ to listen, to reason together, and sharpen iron one with another. To my astonishment, I discovered that *they knew the names of the faithful; Abraham, David, Deborah, Isaiah, Mary of Magdala, Paul, and many more.*

I discovered my place in the history of the church and learned the names of people from long, long ago – *Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Polycarp, Junia, Prisca, and Quintilla*, brothers and sisters in the great family of God.

I became reacquainted with Scripture in new ways, seeing the Bible as a book to marvel at and pore over, the spirit-breathed and living words of Heaven's Creator, active and able to deeply transform our hearts and lives, shaping us for His purpose. I learned to loosen my grip on needing *to know and understand everything* right now, and learned instead to say, "God, show me more of *You*."

My way of thinking about the Christian life shifted dramatically. It became very simple (note that I use the word *simple*, not *easy*): *Confess Jesus is Lord and Saviour (believe the story of Jesus as told us in the gospel) and then take up your cross and follow him, bearing the fruit of a life of repentance.* All else is just noise.

I discovered the messy but vital reality of the local church; filled with sinning and flawed humans who are being renewed daily by the grace of God, asking their questions and voicing their doubts along the way.

I learned what it felt like to be pastored to and personally prayed over, concepts that, bizarrely for a Christian, felt

foreign and strange to me.

I discovered some churches that weren't for me and found others that were. The Christian world is nothing if not perfectly imperfect and there's a lot of diversity out there. It's not for me to judge the legitimacy of their place as one of the Lord's lampstands (Revelation 2:5), but it is my responsibility to use discernment when choosing a church home (1 John 4:1-5).

I found myself asking: what am I responsible to *bring* and what am I responsible to *nurture*? *In this sea of Christianity, how do I best serve and represent Jesus in the place where I now find myself?*

Let me now answer some of the questions that have been put to me. It may be that these are questions on your mind too.

Who Do I Fellowship With?

Well, other Christians of course. A Christian is someone who has "*confessed that Jesus is Lord and believes in their heart that God raised him from the dead.*" (Romans 10:9). They've demonstrated their belief by repenting of their former way of life and by being baptised into the saving name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). They've been transferred out of the dominion of darkness and into the kingdom of the Son of God's love, [a kingdom of life and light](#).

The first letter of John puts it this way:

"What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us – what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His

Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

*This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Him. If we say, "We have fellowship with Him," and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. **If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.**" | 1 John 1:1-7, CSB*

If we abide in Jesus, then we are in common union – community – with all those who are also abiding in him, both in our present time and throughout the ages, a great cloud of faithful witnesses of the risen King, [the people of the kingdom](#) (1 John 2:28, John 15:1-27, Hebrews 12:1-2). We are connected to one another by the precious blood of the lamb and nothing can separate us from the love of God, apart from us choosing to leave the light and walk again in darkness (Romans 8:31-39).

The [ordinance of communion](#) – taking bread and wine together – is an important part of our Christian life, as members of Jesus' body and God's family. It is a key element of Jesus' covenant with each one of us individually and collectively as his church, the price of which was his own blood.

Written about 300 years after the birth of Christ, [the Apostles' Creed](#) summarises the foundational Christian beliefs taught by the early church and is a bold declaration of Christian faith in Jesus Christ. It particularly affirms the teachings regarding Jesus, that of his virgin birth, his crucifixion, his death, and his subsequent resurrection; core elements of the gospel of good news.

It is a primary statement of faith shared by Christians around the world, uniting them in common with the work achieved in and through Jesus. No Christian worth their salt denies this

creed.

The church, the universal church, exists outside denominational walls and extends beyond historical boundaries. There is only *one body* of Jesus Christ, and holding to this spiritual reality means holding to the reality that *fellowship with the body happens when we abide in the body*.

Why Couldn't I Stay And Change The Culture?

Cultures don't happen overnight. Made up of an interconnecting set of goals, roles, processes, values, practices, attitudes, and assumptions, the culture of an organisation is practically its DNA.

Changing a culture takes committed leadership, and often requires years of concerted and consistent effort, including intensive work to communicate and reinforce new ways of thinking, desired values, and changed behaviours. In fact, in the case of organisational transformation (such as church), it can take a minimum of seven to 10 years to change the culture.

But we humans are very resistant to change in general and attempting to change the culture of an organisation is particularly difficult as it's deeply embedded in the system. When people believe that their culture is superior to other cultures, they tend to resist any influence other cultures may bring (you can read more about this [here](#)).

I came to realise that I didn't have 15 years, or 10 years or even seven years up my sleeve. My children had reached their formative and impressionable years and there were many aspects of this culture that I didn't want them to absorb or be absorbed into. I also realised that while I had been hopeful of the possibility of a shift in culture, I had not fully understood how deeply embedded it was in the heart of a system so strongly resistant to change.

This was a culture that has existed for years and years, unchanged and unchallenged. It did not want to change and it saw no need for change. I began to understand it would take many years of sustained and concentrated effort by many more persons than myself, to see any kind of tangible difference.

I felt I had more hope of reaching the moon than I did of changing this culture by staying.

Have I Lost My Faith?

I said that this journey hasn't been easy. And it hasn't.

When a person experiences loss of community, they also have to contend with what can feel like loss of identity. While we would all agree in theory that our identity rests, or should rest, in Jesus, in practice we are also deeply shaped by our place within community, in knowing and being known by the people who surround us.

Beyond the pale is initially daunting and lonely. Everyone you ever knew is on the other side of that fence.

I was [reminded during this time](#) of the story of Hagar, who had been driven into the wilderness by the harsh treatment of her mistress Sarah (Genesis 16:6-13).

Miserable, lonely, and afraid, the Lord found Hagar beside a spring in the wilderness and spoke words of comfort and hope to her. She names God in that place as 'El Roi', meaning, "You are the God who sees me."

I have repeated this to myself many times in the past few years when doubt and discomfort has crept in. Not doubt *in* God, but doubt that He still had His hand over my life, that He was the God who looks after me, that I was still seen and known.

Having faith is firstly a posture of the heart, an orientation

of trust in or towards something or someone. My faith was placed in Jesus at 16 years old and my trust in God remains firm. I remain confident that the Spirit will lead me in all truth and that the important things God wishes me to know, He will make known.

I trust Him, even when I am confused about His plans for me, even when I don't understand the lessons He's teaching me, even when I can't see what the future holds.

I trust Him even when I'm wracked with anxiety and overwhelmed by uncertainty. I trust Him even when life is challenging and change is necessary. I trust Him because I believe that the same Spirit that rose Jesus from the dead *lives in me*. If God is for me, who can be against me?

This journey has challenged me in ways I never imagined and I've wondered many, many times, *how did I get here?* But I know, for sure, He is still the God who sees me and takes care of me.

I have not lost my faith.

Where Would I Find Nurture And Support?

The wilderness is an unforgiving landscape, where all reliance on self is brutally highlighted for what it is, inadequate, insufficient, a lie. To my dismay, I initially found myself echoing the murmurs of the children of Israel in the wilderness. I wondered, had God brought me out here to die?

This was the first lesson I had to learn: Jesus never promised this Christian life would be easy.

The second was this: God always provides.

It was not the wilderness I imagined it to be. God sent people into my life during this time: good, loving, solid, Jesus-loving people, who prayed with me, ate with me, opened their

homes and shared their lives with me.

They personally testified to God's goodness in both good times and bad. They encouraged me to persevere in faith, nurture forgiveness, run after grace, and ground myself in God's love. *"Love bears all things",* they reminded me, *"believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."*

Like the children of Israel who had wandered in the wilderness, God had ensured I was still provided for.

***"There's honey in the rock
Water in the stone
Manna on the ground
No matter where I go
I don't need to worry now that I know
Everything I need You've got"***

Honey In The Rock | Brooke Ligertwood

Where To From Here?

I am a Christian for the rest of my days. *I believe in Jesus Christ, descended from David, risen from the dead. This is my gospel.*

But as to the next step? *I don't know* what God has in store for my future.

I hope to be a part of a flourishing and vibrant church. I hope to serve and witness alongside people whom I get to love and know deeply, and by whom I feel seen and loved in return.

I hope to be a worthy example of faith for my children and a trusted companion and woman of valour to my husband.

I hope that God uses me in many small, indiscernible ways to help grow His kingdom here on earth. If He has larger, more visible plans in mind, I hope I have the courage to step into His calling for me.

I hope to avoid pain and difficulty and loss, but I know these will inevitably come my way, so I hope to be brave and true when they do.

And in all these things, I recognise that I will be flawed, always flawed, but I continue to give thanks for the grace of God and the blood of Jesus, which cleanses us from all sin.

Most of all, I hope to hear the words of the king on that final day: *“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”*