

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