

ARE YOU A CITIZEN OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?

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Lemah Putro, Sunday, August 18, 2019

Shalom,

Before getting its independence on August 17, 1945, Indonesian had been colonized for ±350 years by the Dutch and ±3.5 years by the Japanese. Now we have just celebrated the 74th Independence Day. As the legal Indonesia citizens, we surely have an ID card as an evidence of our citizenship. The Indonesian government issues legal documents like ID card, passport, Family Card, Birth Certificate, etc. that are acknowledged internationally; and every citizen must present them when they would like to apply for a permit or other businesses. Those legal documents are essential in every country.

However, there was a person who promoted another 'kingdom' even though he had had a citizenship of a certain country. Because of his testimony, people called him the world troublemaker and so he became a wanted person. Who is this guy? He is the Apostle Paul who testified in the synagogues in Thessalonica about Jesus, the Messiah, who died and rose from the dead. Many Greeks, including chief women, believed him and worked together with Paul and Silas. Having seen this, the Jews became envious. They took some of the evil men from the marketplace to go together to Jason's house to seek Paul and Silas, with an intention to bring them to justice accusing them of breaking the Caesar's decree by acknowledging another king, Jesus. When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city because they gave a shelter for Paul and Silas. After receiving a bail from Jason, they let them go (Acts 17:1-8).

What kingdom and citizenship the Apostle Paul offer that caused him captivated and imprisoned? We have the **Heaven Citizenship** and we are eagerly waiting for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, *“who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself (Philippians 3:20-21).”*

Introspection: dare we declare Jesus as the Messiah and King who will come for His church? Honestly, we often dare to claim Jesus only in church, and we would be silent amongst the societies. We are mute especially to confess as Christians when there is a religious intolerance or when the government forbids any religious attributes at public.

When we claim ourselves as an Indonesian citizen and also a citizen of heaven, does it mean we have double citizenships - as Indonesians we are under a president, but we are also ruled under Jesus Christ, the King of all Kings? Mostly, we have only one ID card and one passport. When someone has more than one ID card and one passport, he must have a bad intention of misusing them. A passport has an expiration date. Do we also have the proof as heaven citizens? As citizens of the Republic of Indonesia, we must obey Indonesia's rules and laws. It also applies to the citizens of heaven, we must obey the rules and laws of the Owner of Heaven. The Apostle Paul was a Jew but he had a citizenship as a Roman (Acts 22:25). Bravely, he declared himself as the citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. Does it mean his heart is in two places that he served the Romans government and also the government of heaven? They are certainly different matters. One is in the earth which has expiration date and the ID can be faked, meanwhile heaven is something eternal. For this, the Apostle Paul was willing to be imprisoned for Jesus, the King of all kings, and was waiting for His second coming. Therefore, the pulpit should be used for declaring the Kingdom of Heaven, its Owner and His works instead of promoting the pastors. From the pulpit, we should also pray for our country, president and vice president, members of the Cabinet, so that they all work in the path of the eternal Kingdom of Heaven. Unlike the Kingdom of Heaven, the worldly kingdoms cannot give a certainty - there are times for prosperity and peace, but also for economic, political and social crisis. There has been no country/kingdom able to stay stable all years through. For example: the great Roman empire was ruined and scattered, the United Kingdom separated itself from the EU in 2018, etc. Hence, it's true that we must love our country, Indonesia, but we must not forget that promising Kingdom of Heaven.

When did the worldly kingdom firstly exist on earth? Besides being fruitful and multiplying, God gave an absolute right to Adam and Eve to have dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:28). Everything had been run in a good order because Adam and Eve still obeyed the word of God at the time. Nevertheless, disobeying God, they failed before even bearing any children. As the result, they were cast out from the Garden of Eden and lived in labor (Genesis 3:16-19, 24). Years went by and in the age of Noah, his descendants started to grow and spread. Each of them tried to build a kingdom (Genesis 10). That time, the whole earth had one language and one speech. Then, men wanted to build a city with a tower which top was in heaven. They wanted to name it, but God found no favor in it so the LORD scattered them to all over the earth (Genesis 11:1-8).

What kind of Kingdom of Heaven that the Apostle Paul longed to see? Is it true that the Kingdom is eternal and unshaken? What's the proof?

◆ God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans to the land that He would show him. God also made a promise to make his name great, to make him a great nation, and a blessing of all nations (Genesis 12:1-3).

25 years later, Sarah, Abraham's wife, bore Isaac in the land of Canaan (Genesis 21:2, 5). Rebekah, Isaac's wife bore Esau and Jacob (Genesis 25:24-26). The promise of the Lord worked for the three generations - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 3:6). Strangely, though **Abraham** was in the promised-land (Canaan), his heart still **longed for the city built by God** (Hebrews 11:8-10).

Introspection: Are our hearts still attached to the prosperous Indonesian lands? Or do we long for the city built by God Himself? The world is truly passing away (1 John 2:17), but the Bible gives a certainty of faith for the eternal Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, we have a task to share the Gospel of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ for the sake of our country and nation. If we claim that we have a citizenship in the Heavenly Kingdom, can we show our "ID Card" as an access to His Kingdom? Are we ready to welcome Jesus' second coming?

◆ The Israelites had known the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for thousands of years, yet none of their kings really glorified the LORD as the King of all kings who has the eternal kingdom. Ironically, instead of the kings of Israelite, **Nebuchadnezzar**, the king of Babel who was an idol worshipper, was the one who bowed before Daniel for he was able to interpret his dream.

Hence he said, *"Truly your God is the **God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets**, since you could reveal this secret (Daniel 2:44-47)."*

Previously **King Nebuchadnezzar** captured the Israelites and took them to Babylon from Canaan. Then he chose some competent, knowledgeable, young Jewish - Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego - to be taught of the Chaldean language. So, they worked in the king's palace. One day the king dreamt about a great statue whose head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. Then, came a little rock struck its feet so the statue broke into pieces. Then the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found, and the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. Nebuchadnezzar called all the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to interpret his dreams, but none of them able to explain it except **Daniel** who got the wisdom from God. Thus, the difference between the Babylonians' gods and the living God of Israelites was crystal clear here, and even King Nebuchadnezzar

admitted this.

Application: As Christians, we must testify, so others (the non-Christians) would admit that Jesus is the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. Let's not be a Christian who is looking for a shaman's help instead.

◆ On another occasion, **King Nebuchadnezzar** made an image of gold and asked people from all nations to *“fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up at the time they hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery. Whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace”* (Daniel 3:1-6, 1-11). As **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego** refused to worship the statue, they were cast to the fiery furnace. Amazingly, a miracle took place. They didn't get burnt at all and in fact, there were four people freely walking in the midst of fire. Having seen the spectacular wonder, Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed, *“Nebuchadnezzar the king, to all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that **the Most High God** has worked for me. How great are His signs, and how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and **His dominion is from generation to generation...** This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones. In order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men...And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and **I blessed the Most High** and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an **everlasting dominion**, and His kingdom is from generation to generation...Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down (Daniel 4:1-3, 17, 34-37).”*

Acknowledgement that the God of Israelites is the almighty God with an eternal Kingdom came from the mouth of King Nebuchadnezzar. This shows that God reigns in all kinds of kingdoms and sovereigns even in a country that doesn't believe in God or a communist country. Because of his pride, King Nebuchadnezzar was put in the lowest condition and lost his sanity, yet finally, his condition was restored and he glorified the King of Heaven. Therefore, beware, for *“pride goes before destruction (Proverb 16:18).”* Didn't Lucifer/ Satan also fall because of his pride (Isaiah 14:12-15)?

□ **King Darius** made a firm decree, *“that whoever petitioned any god or man for thirty days should be cast into the den of lions (Daniel 6:8).”* Despite that decree, **Daniel** kept on praying to God as usual, so

he was cast to the den of lions. That made King Darius so sad and he couldn't fall to sleep. Early in the morning, he then went to the lion den and cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. Daniel responded to him, so the king made an order to take Daniel out of the lion den and put Daniel's accusers to the lion den with their wives and children instead. Seeing how Daniel was saved from the hungry lions, king Darius gave a command, *"That in every dominion of my kingdom **men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions*** (Daniel 6:26-27)."

◆ Some eras may pass, kings may change, but the King of all kings will never change. Likewise, the worldly governments always change, but God's authority never changes. Therefore, Jesus - the King of all kings - **taught His disciples** the Lord's prayer, **inviting the Kingdom of the Father in heaven to come to the earth** (Matthew 6:10). He also reminded them not to worry for what to eat, drink, or wear, but to **seek first the Kingdom of God** and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto them (vv. 31-33).

Jesus knows His Father's heart that would be willing to have mercy and joyfully gives His Kingdom to whoever asks for it. Who doesn't want to get a noble, eternal, unshaken kingdom with the unchanging King? Nevertheless, why do we tend to be unmotivated to ask for it as if we don't really want to see this Kingdom of Heaven and its Owner?

Jesus told His disciples to take up their cross if they desired to follow Him and they shall see the Son of Man coming as the King of His Kingdom (Matthew 16: 24, 28). In other words, those who have the right to take part in the Kingdom of Heaven are those who are willing to follow the Lord in His sufferings. Walking on the path of the cross has been the characteristic of the citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom; thus, they no longer busy themselves in pursuing worldly riches or positions. Instead, they would only want to please the Heavenly Father who'll bring His Kingdom.

Before **Pilate**, Jesus said that His Kingdom was not of the earth, for if it were so, surely His servants would have fought so that He wouldn't be given to the Jews. Pilate then asked, "Are you a king then?" and Jesus answered, *"You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world..* (John 18:36-37)."
Before Jesus was crucified, nobody believed that He was a King except **a criminal** who was hung next to Him and said, *"Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom* (Luke 23:42)."
This criminal had never known Jesus before, but he used the chance - just

before he died - to believe that Jesus is the King.

When **Jesus changed the water into wine**, the party leader told the bride groom, *“Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now.”* (John 2:9)

Jesus is the only one able to give the best, so don't reject the best and incomparable book - the Bible (the Word of God). If we are not interested in becoming the citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, it means we reject the best offer. Who are we looking for? Don't look for eloquent pastors for we won't get anything from them, but look for Jesus and His righteousness as well as long for His second coming.

Truly, we must be joyful for as Indonesians, we have got our independence; moreover, we have also been freed forever by the sacrifice of Jesus. He who has begun good work in us will complete it until we reach perfection when Jesus Christ comes again (Philippians 1:6, 10) and we will surely rejoice on that day (Philippians 2:16). Remember, *“The Lord is at hand (Philippians 4:5),”* which means that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming soon and we have got the peace and joy of God. Jesus Christ is watching over us and guarding our hearts and minds. Therefore, we shall do what we have heard, and the God of peace will be with us (vv. 6-9). As the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, we don't need to worry of our future for we have obtained the guarantee to live with the Lord in His unshaken Kingdom forever and ever. Amen.