

EVIDENCE OF SALVATION

Scriptures: Philippians 1:27-30; John 17:20-26

This week I was thinking about what most people consider a measure of success, so I went to Google.com, put in the words “measure of success,” and clicked search. I got 3,900,000 responses. Among them I found this story. According to the story, there was a meeting in Chicago in 1923 that included nine of the richest men in the world. I discovered through additional research there is no record of this meeting, but the nine people mentioned in the story are real people who had considerable wealth and power in the 1920s. Their names were

- Charles M. Schwab, not the stockbroker but an earlier Charles Schwab who was the president of Bethlehem Steel.
- Samuel Insull, who ran a conglomerate of utility and transportation companies valued at \$3 billion dollar, back when a billion dollars was still worth something.
- Howard Hopson, who owned Associated Gas and Electric, one of the nation’s largest utilities.
- Arthur Cutten, one of America’s most successful commodity traders.
- Richard Whitney, a Harvard grad who became president of the New York Stock Exchange.
- Albert Fall, Secretary of the Interior under President Warren G. Harding.
- Leon Fraser, a law professor at Columbia University, who rose from private to major during World War I and received the Distinguished Service Cross before becoming president of the Bank of International Settlements.
- Jessie Livermore, one of the most successful brokers in American history and author of an acclaimed book on stock trading.
- Ivar Kreuger, the head of Kreuger and Toll, one of the most widely held stock companies in America in the 1920s.

Talk about measures of success! This gathering included wealthy and powerful business leaders, highly educated scholars, influential politicians, a best-selling author, and a decorated war hero. You and I would not have been invited.

Neither would the apostle Paul. But I don’t think he would have cared, because Paul was concerned about something else. He says to the Philippians, “Only live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” The phrase “live your life” comes from the Greek word *politeuma*, from which we get the word “politics.” “Make your politics, your life in community, worthy of the gospel of Christ.” In Philippians 3:20, Paul uses the same word *politeuma* when he says, “But our citizenship is in heaven ...” When Paul says, “Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ,” he means live like citizens of heaven, not citizens of Rome.

Citizenship was a big deal in the Roman Empire. Foreigners paid large sums of money for the privilege of Roman citizenship. But Philippi was an official Roman military colony, even though it was located on the eastern edge of Greece. It was somewhat like Guantanamo Bay, without the prison. Guantanamo Bay is an official American military installation on the shores of Cuba. Philippi was an official Roman colony on the shores of Greece, and the people of

Philippi were Roman citizens. But Paul tells the Christians in Philippi, “Your citizenship is not in Rome; your citizenship is in heaven. So live as citizens of heaven whose supreme ruler is Jesus, not as citizens of an empire whose supreme ruler is Caesar.”

But what does it look like to live as citizens of Christ’s kingdom, instead of Caesar’s kingdom? What does it look like to be citizens of heaven instead of citizens of Rome?

Paul answers this in our second scripture reading:

Only live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents.

When Paul describes what it means to be a citizen of heaven, he does not talk about rights, privileges, or freedom; he talks about unity and faithfulness. Stand firm in one spirit and strive side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel. Unity in the family of Christ and faithfulness to the gospel of Christ are the marks of citizenship in the kingdom of God.

They are also the signs of salvation. Listen to the next sentence. “For them [meaning the opponents] this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation.” In other words the values of an empire—to conquer, acquire, surpass, dominate, and triumph—will eventually lead to its own destruction. But the values of Christ’s kingdom—unity in the family of Christ and faithfulness to the gospel of Christ—will eventually lead to salvation.

We have here two competing value systems: success and salvation. Success is measured by superiority; salvation by community. Success is measured by the quality of your achievements; salvation is measured by the quality of your relationships. Success is measured by being stellar; salvation by being steadfast. Success is measured by greatness; salvation by faithfulness. The one path eventually leads to destruction, the other to eternal life.

So what happened to those nine success stories that reportedly gathered in Chicago in 1923?

- Charles Schwab, the president of Bethlehem Steel, wasted his fortune in lavish spending and high stakes gambling, and died bankrupt in 1939.
- Samuel Insull, the billionaire, saw his empire crash in 1932 and fled the country to escape trial on charges of mail fraud and embezzlement.
- Howard Hopson, the utility magnate, was indicted for criminal fraud. He was twice sent to a psychiatric hospital to determine if he was mentally competent to stand trial and eventually died in a sanitarium.
- Arthur Cutten, the commodity broker, died shortly before he was to begin serving a prison sentence on tax evasion (like an earlier version of Kenneth Lay, the Enron exec.).
- Richard Whitney, the president of the New York Stock Exchange, was sentenced to state prison for grand larceny.
- Albert Fall, the Secretary of the Interior, was imprisoned for bribery.

- Leon Fraser, the scholar and war hero, shot himself in 1945.
- Jessie Livermore, the broker and author, also committed suicide.
- Ivar Kreuger, the stock broker, went bankrupt in 1932 and shot himself.

The values of empire—wealth, power, and fame—these usual measures of success carry within them the seeds of their own destruction. Giving your allegiance to an empire is a dangerous thing, because the empires of this world are destined to pass away.

But we are citizens of a different kingdom. Our lives are shaped by a different set of values. To illustrate, let me close with a story. This comes from a book called *Resident Aliens* by Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon. The title comes from the notion that Christians are, in a sense, resident aliens. We live in an earthly kingdom, but our true citizenship is in higher kingdom. To illustrate the authors tell a story about a woman named Dorothy.

In the church where one of us was raised, Dorothy was a perpetual member of the third grade church school class. Every child in the church knew that, when you arrived at third grade in the primary division of the Buncombe Street Church Sunday School, Dorothy would be in your class. She had even been in the class when some of our parents were in third grade. Dorothy was in charge of handing out pencils, checking names in the roll book, and taking up the pencils. We thought she was the teacher's assistant. It was much later, when we were nearly all grown up and adult, that the world told us that Dorothy was someone with Down syndrome. At the church, we were under the impression that Dorothy was the teacher's assistant. When Dorothy died, in her early fifties, ... the whole church turned out for her funeral. No one mentioned that Dorothy was retarded or afflicted. Many testified to how fortunate they had been to know her (p. 93).

You see, we are citizens of a different kingdom. Ours is not the kingdom of empire, the kingdom of wealth, power, and position. For us, the true measure of success, the evidence of salvation, is not in superiority but in community; not in greatness but in faithfulness; not in the quality of our achievements but in the quality of our relationships. The former will eventually pass away; the latter is what we will take with us into the kingdom of God.

- Ken Onstot
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