

EARTH'S IMMIGRANTS OR HEAVEN'S DIPLOMATS?

“As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly” [1 Cor. 15: 48]

“For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven” [Phil. 3:20] “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ” [2 Cor. 5:20]

Routinely these days, the 100-metre race is done in less than 10 seconds. The world record holder in this event is honoured with the prestigious title, “the fastest man in the world.” Do you know why the race is done within such a flash? Is it because men are getting stronger and faster? No. It is because the winner is defined as the first to breast the tape! Now, let's assume that the world's athletic authorities were to change the rule to “the last to cross the finishing line.” The race would never end because every competitor would slow down, if not run backwards! If you think that that possibility is too remote, I challenge you to examine your own attitude to life here on earth.

Before we became human beings, I believe that our spirits had lived somewhere, and when we die, we shall go back to where we came from or elsewhere [Eccl. 12:7]. When God spoke to Jeremiah, He told him, “before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee” [Jer. 1:5]. Of course, we remember Jim Reeves' popular song, “this world is not my home, I'm just passing through...” That is why Paul has said that we are citizens of Heaven [Phil. 3:20].

We do know that a mansion awaits each of us in Heaven [Jn 14: 2-3], a place paved with gold [Rev. 21:18], where there is no death or sorrow, crying or pain [Rev. 21:4]. In deed, “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” [Is. 64:4; 1 Cor. 2: 9]. So, if Heaven (capitalized as we would the name of every country) is so rich and beautiful, why are we so reluctant to die so that we can go there sooner than later? Why are we like athletes running backwards or slowing down, doing everything to remain longer in this “miserable” world and conforming to its ways? Are we Heaven's diplomats (i.e., ambassadors of Christ, as Paul has called believers) or we have become Earth's immigrants?

Let's find out!

1. An immigrant or a diplomat?

An immigrant is a person who has renounced the citizenship of his/her country of origin/birth and naturalized in his/her country of residence. The major concern is how to integrate into the new place by language, mode of dress, way of life, etc., so that you can get into the mainstream. You may still have reminiscences of your former land and pay occasional heritage visits, but in due course, your descendants might lose such an attachment. A good example is what has become the American nation today that is a melting pot of virtually every race and nation on earth. With the possible exception of family name, many Americans no longer know where their ancestors originally came from.

A diplomat, on the other hand, is resident in another country but remains a citizen of his/her country of birth/origin. He/she enjoys diplomatic immunity from the host nation in the sense that you cannot try them in the host country's law courts without their permission. They don't pay taxes to the host country. They observe their own country's public holidays (in addition to the host nation's), and the building where they work (called an embassy) is an extension of their country's territory. On every occasion, they are working to tell their hosts wonderful things about their home country. In their conduct, mode of dressing, etc., they are doing everything to portray their country in good light. At the end of their tour of duty, they return home before getting another posting.

Many believers are beginning to behave more like immigrants than diplomats. We do make occasional heritage visits home, such as when we go to church on Sundays, or pray in time of trouble. However, by our conduct, we are a disgrace to Heaven. Our investment plans, earthly pursuits and values and our reluctance to preach the Good News to non-believers confirm our immigrant status. How did we get there? Let's do a quick review.

2. The first Garden and the first Adam: how we lost our citizenship of Heaven

The Garden of Eden had all the characteristics of Heaven: environmentally clean and healthy, and rich in gold [Gen. 2:8-14]. It had joy, gladness, thanksgiving and the voice of melody [Is. 51:3]. The presence of God was felt because He walked "in the garden in the cool of the day" [Gen. 3:8]. Cherubim, the same chief angels that are close to the throne of God in Heaven, manned its gates [Gen. 3:24; Rev. 4: 6-8].

By all definitions, the Garden of Eden was God's embassy on earth and Adam was the first ambassador. The consular section (where visas are issued) had the "tree of life" and the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" [Gen. 2:16-17], but God specifically warned Adam not to go there. Recall that Lucifer had by then lost his citizenship of Heaven on account of rebellion against God, and he had been thrown to the earth [Lk 10:18; Rev. 12: 7-9]. He had tried to return but God had refused him back [Is. 14: 12-15]. So, Satan and his fallen angels became the first immigrants from Heaven. From then on, his ambition was to make sure that he became the god of the

earth [2 Cor. 4:4]. Do you think he would allow an embassy from Heaven to be established there? So, aware of Satan's evil designs, God had appropriately warned Adam and his wife to avoid the consular section where the devil and his angels could be waiting for them with visa application forms, not for Heaven but for citizenship of his kingdom!

Not quite long after and out of curiosity, Eve strolled past the consular section and, behold, Satan was actually waiting [Gen. 3:1]. In his usual subtle ways, he succeeded in getting Eve, and later her husband, to *willingly* give up their citizenship of Heaven [Gen. 3:23-24]. They ate the forbidden fruit and their physical bodies lost their immortality while their souls lost the light of God's presence [Gen. 14-21]. Having lost their diplomatic immunity, the embassy was closed and God put Cherubim to watch over His property, pending when it was reopened in due course [Gen. 3:24].

Implications

The children of immigrants are the citizens of their parents' adopted country. So, we who are the descendants of Adam and Eve, became by birth citizens of the earth for "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" [Rom. 3:23]. We took on the language and culture of the New World system, which has the following features, among others:

- (a) We began to walk by sight rather than by faith. In other words, scientific thinking replaced spiritual reality; intellectual advancement became equated with wisdom. God no longer created man but he evolved from the apes!
- (b) The love of earthly (material) things and values displaced the love of God; the carnal (natural) man is in, the spiritual man is out; death is the end of life, not its beginning.
- (c) The self-made man has arrived. He can even become a god if he chooses! [Dan. 4:30; Acts 12:21-22]

When God gives you a natural gift, He does not ever withdraw it, even when you abuse it. For example, you remain brilliant even when you choose to be illiterate. Having given man dominion over all His creations, the fallen man has continued to perform scientific wonders to the point of now trying to play God by attempting to clone humans. That is what has reinforced our belief in the power and sufficiency of the world system. However, it is only the fool who thinks that there is no God [Ps. 14:1].

3. Another Garden and another Adam: man's citizenship of Heaven is restored

Four thousand years later, the promised "Seed of the Woman" [Gen. 3:15], the Son of God [Jn 3:16], was born in flesh as Jesus Christ. Isaiah had prophesied that He would be called Emmanuel, God with us [Is. 7:14]. He would also be called "Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of

Peace” [Is. 9:6]. The incarnation of Christ as the Son of man is not just that God came in flesh but, as Jesse Duplantis (an American church minister) put it recently, that *Infinite God* emptied Himself into *finite space*. Let me make this clearer.

The air we breathe is everywhere in space. If it was to get into a bottle and that bottle was corked, there would be no difference between the air in that bottle and the one in space. If the air in the bottle had a voice and it announced that it was the same as and equal to the air in space, that would be a true statement. At the same time, for as long as that bottle remained corked, the air there would be distinct from the air in space. You can then understand why Paul called Jesus Christ the *image of the invisible God* [Col. 1:15].

In coming to rescue man from the deathtrap of sin and death, He said, “I am the *way*, the *truth* and the *life*: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me” [[Jn 14:6]. As the way, He pointed us the direction back to God. As the truth, He has returned us to the knowledge of reality that we had lost. As the life, death has been destroyed and eternal life in heaven restored. For reopening the embassy, Paul has called Jesus Christ the “last Adam” [1 Cor. 15:45]. In another garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, with His sweat “as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” [Lk 22:44], Jesus *willingly* [Jn 10:18] surrendered to His Father’s will [[Lk 22:42] to save humankind from the clutches of sin and death. In this garden, manned by human sentries, obedience displaced the first Adam’s disobedience and the process of restoring our citizenship began until it was completed on mount Calvary the next day.

The new embassy would no longer be physical. It was going to be in the hearts of believers for, as Jesus Himself put it, “if a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love Him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him” [Jn 14:23]. So, in order to reclaim your citizenship of Heaven, here is the application procedure:

- (a) Give up your earthly passport by renouncing Satan and his works and confessing your sins. This is an important step because you cannot serve God and mammon *at the same time*. Unless you first give up your passport as a citizen of Satan’s kingdom, the world system, you cannot apply for a new passport to Heaven;
- (b) Accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour, and be baptized of water and of the Holy Spirit [Jn 3:5].

Once you have fulfilled those requirements, Jesus Christ will issue you a fresh passport [Jn 10: 9; Jn 14:6], which has been validated with His blood [Lk 22:20]. In addition, you will become His ambassador on earth [2 Cor. 5:20]. Since you are now the temple of the living God [2 Cor. 6:16-18] and the Kingdom of God lives within you [Lk 17:21], Jesus Christ lives in you [2 Cor. 13:5]. Your body becomes God’s embassy and your duties will include living a godly life, in spite of hardships and persecutions [2 Tim. 3:12], and preaching the gospel with signs and wonders

following [Mk 15:15-20]. No wonder Paul called himself “an ambassador in bonds” [Eph. 6:20].

Your final return home to Heaven (by bodily death) at the end of your tour of earthly duty becomes something to look forward to, for “we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens for in this we groan *earnestly desiring* to be clothed upon with our house which is in heaven” [2 Cor. 5:1-2].

4. Diplomats in action

The new spirit that God has given us as Christ’s ambassadors is not one of fear but of power, love and a sound mind [2 Tim. 1:7]. Let’s learn how diplomats are expected to use the new spirit.

(a) Fear

A major fear to conquer is the fear of death. Death is the gateway to eternal bliss in Heaven. So, why should you dread it?

Jesus spoke about death as the next page of His ministry. “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world and go to the Father” [Jn 16:28]. Speaking of his coming death, Paul wrote to Timothy, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” [2 Tim. 4:6-7]. Next time the fear of death grips you, remember those memorable words. *For a true believer, death is right whenever and however it comes.*

Another fear to overcome is fear of man. Many of us do not defend the truth or uphold principles for fear of others, especially our elders and bosses. At home, on our jobs and in our businesses, we deny Christ before men while clutching to His passport in our hearts. Let’s imitate Peter who used to be so cowardly that he denied Jesus thrice during His trial. But, after receiving the Holy Spirit, he stood before the very powerful Jewish Council to say, “we ought to obey God rather than men” [Acts 5:29]. He had become an ambassador!

(b) Power

Almost every believer that I have come across prays for spiritual power (for miracles, prophecies, speaking in tongues, etc.) but he/she hardly uses it!

As Jesus has put it, signs and wonders follow believers; they don’t precede them [Mk 16:17-18]. If you don’t exercise faith, nothing follows. A deadly viper bit Paul’s arm while he was collecting sticks to make fire soon after he had survived a shipwreck on the way to Rome. He simply shook it off and continued his work. No harm came to him from the venomous bite! [Acts 28:1-5]

(c) Love

Here is a description of the early church:

*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And **all that believed were together and had all things in common... as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord... did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.** [Acts 2: 42-47]*

Those early diplomats showed love that is painfully missing among denomination-driven believers of today.

(d) Sound mind

From **Genesis** to **Revelation**, there is enough distilled knowledge shared by the community of believers to guide their daily conduct in addition to fresh insights from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, don't retard your work by playing down advice from others or by refusing to use what is already available.

It was Moses' father-in-law who gave him the management principle of delegation, which enabled him to lead the Israelites for 40 years [Ex. 18:13-27]. The Apostles copied that when they were about to set up the first administration for the early church [Acts 6:1-6]. The Apostles added prayers to the popular practice of casting lots [Jn 19:23-24] to choose a successor to Judas Iscariot [Acts 1:23-26]. Where such advice is wrong, God will counter it as in the case of David's plan to build the Lord's temple [2 Sam. 7:1-17]. So, we should learn to tap from the wisdom that God has given to others to advance our work as diplomats.

5. Conclusion

Among today's believers, there are those who believe that their home is in Heaven. In their daily walk, they are moving in that direction. I have called that group "diplomats." However, there is another group, which, although they believe in Heaven, are very reluctant to give up their worldly ways and values. These are the "immigrants." It is true that the "earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" [Ps. 24:1], and that "the righteous shall inherit the land and dwell there forever" [Ps. 37:29]. However, you will have to die first and be judged! It is only at the end of time that the New Jerusalem will be descended from Heaven [Rev. 21:1-2]. It is the righteous diplomats who will ultimately become the true immigrants that will inherit the earth forever. So, enrol today in God's diplomatic service!