



By Brent Crowe



THE WANDER BOX

Introduction:

It's a quasi-paradoxical notion that one can simultaneously be a citizen of an earthly country and a citizen of the heavenly country. The apostle Paul said as much when he wrote in Philippians 3:20-21:

our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject everything to himself.¹

Many traversing this little blue marble can claim a type of dual citizenship and possess a passport from, say, both Pakistan and Australia. Any number of combinations whereby a member of humanity enjoys the constitutional rights, responsibilities, privileges, and protections from two countries concurrently means that person is, legally, a citizen of two countries. As incredible a notion as that may be, it is a wholly different thing to say with Paul, "our citizenship is in heaven". To be a temporary citizen of Botswana, for example, and an eternal citizen of heaven is something that moves beyond incredible and into the realm of the miraculous.

Those who have been graced with this type of dual citizenship are "holy brothers and sisters, who share in a heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3:1). This is a calling that all Christians understand. You see, no matter our birthdate in history, our ethnicity, or what nation-state we were born into – to have responded to the whisper of God as He breathed salvation into our souls is to travel on a guest pass in one land while forever belonging to another. Our salvation comes from and invites us to heaven through the finished work of Christ on the cross.

All who share in this heavenly calling once wandered aimlessly without even a spark to light up the darkness that surrounded us. To drown in darkness seemed to be the agonizing theme of our story. Then something happened. The Redeemer stood

¹ *CSB Bible*. Holman Bible Publishers, 2018. Unless otherwise noted, the author will use CSB for the entire publication.

square in front of our poorly wandered path and bid us to come and follow Him. It was a proposal born from eternity past as the fullest measure of kindness possible. The invitation and response then transformed our story.

Living, not dying, became our reality.

Light, not darkness, illuminated our being.

Hope, not despair, motivates our belief.

When there was no living, no light, and no hope, the story had become very bleak indeed. It's a story of depressing reality and darkened days, shackled to an anchor of despair sure to drown all it encounters. But when Jesus transforms our story, something new is born –or created – or both. It is a story that now has redemption as the central theme and Jesus the Redeemer as the focal point and central hero of the story. This heavenly calling delivers and frees us from being the hero or the villain. Ours is a story where we share in the victory of the Hero knowing the villain-of-all-villains has been vanquished. When Jesus is the hero of our narrative, the potential for our story now rests in the mind and imagination of God. In short, redemption changes our reality.

For the purposes of this book, we are going to focus on an oft overlooked aspect of our redeemed reality. And to be honest, it is something felt as much as it is learnt. It's a tension that seems to swell the longer we live and the closer we get to home, a tension that feeds the understanding that, for a short time, we belong here and there. We belong to the age we were born into, while simultaneously belonging to a place that is outside of time. In Book 1 of the Wander Box, we explored the idea of wandering well and shining like stars. In Book 7, we will explore a part of the wandering that pertains to the tension of here and there.

HERE = the guest pass we know as our earthly citizenship

THERE = the destination of our wandering – the heaven country

If we belong to an age and place in history, how should we think about said age and place? To accomplish attaining an answer to this question, we will turn to the idea of patriotism.

Patriotism is so much more than what it has come to mean in a modern and polarized age. It can't be reduced to an us-versus-them mentality, merch and music, slogans and bumper stickers, caricatures and crisis, hysterics and hyperbole. All of these seek to co-opt patriotism, many times with a fear-based approach. When understood properly, patriotism is an idea that guides rather than divides. It is first substantive before it is sensational.

The word patriotism comes from the Latin pater which means father. Simply put, patriotism is an informed excitement and passion for the fatherland. Keep in mind that fatherland means the country of one's birth or belonging. It is a belief in and commitment to a vision that revolves around the best version of a person's country. The patriot is devoted to the highest and most noble ideals of her or his nation. It is a healthy emotion driven by the highest ideals. While it can't save you, when understood, it can help guide you.

In the following pages, we want to explore what it means to be a patriot, a person committed to the best version of her or his country. I am writing this as an American citizen. I am both grateful for and love my country. And though I believe the ideas that will be discussed are applicable and transferable to other countries, our focus will concentrate on being a patriot in The United States of America. To accomplish this, we will primarily study 158 of the most important words written in the history of this country, contained in the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall

seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.²

This section of the Declaration of Independence has been chosen because it articulates some of the most noble ideals our new country should aim towards. A country is an idea before it ever has states and borders, legislative bodies and laws, an army and armed conflicts. And the idea of the country determines the ideals for the country. Of course, the basic idea of America was “to dissolve the political bands which have connected” the thirteen colonies to England and create a new country.

With this in mind, the Declaration of Independence would be the most important document in the separation from England and the efforts by the Continental Congress to found a new country. The document itself, along with the content, demonstrated this idea. And the section that will receive our attention brings six ideals to the surface for the American people to aspire to. Keep in mind that an ideal is a concept to strive towards, a goal to aim at, a picture of what could be. When taken together, these six ideals paint a model or paradigm of what it would mean to be an American patriot.

Our central ambition here is to extract these ideals and codify them into a set of principles that can serve as a guide for our thoughts and actions as temporary citizens of this country. But as followers of Jesus, our task only begins at this point. We must then challenge those ideals to discover if they align with the teachings of Scripture. As with all things, the Christian’s desire should be to make God obvious through every aspect of life. As the apostle Paul wrote, “whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). To accomplish this, we will be asking two questions:

² Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776.

What are the most noble ideals of our nation?

and

Are those ideals consistent with the Scriptures?

Are the ideals found in the opening section of the Declaration of Independence consistent with biblical ideals for Christian living? Furthermore, can an ethic of patriotism be extracted that will further one's pursuit to live worthy of the gospel? The answer to these questions is the aspiration of this book.

To arrive at a clear ethic of patriotism, some brief context and explanation of certain words will be provided. Therefore, part one will focus on the rhetorical— pathos, logos, and ethos. This is to demonstrate the need and task of Christian ethics. Attention will also be given to key characters and events surrounding the writing of the Declaration of Independence (which will be referred to as the Declaration or DOI), along with the document itself. Part two will then focus in on ideals outlined in the founding document and evaluate those ideals through the grid of Scripture.

Disclaimer and Delimitation: what I'm not and what it ain't

One of my pet peeves in life is when people pretend to be something that they aren't. Hypocrisy, it seems to me, is an acceptable sin in many circles. But a hypocrite lies with their hypocrisy. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warned against hypocrisy while teaching about righteous actions such as giving to those less fortunate. He preached,

So whenever you give to the poor, don't sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward (Mat. 6:2).

The term hypocrite is another term in the Greek language for play actor. New Testament Leon Morris described how “the word was used for actors who, of course, play a part and whose words are spoken for effect and not in order to convey the truth.”³ In essence a hypocrite is a pretender.

As a preacher, teacher, and author I want to guard my heart against the sin of hypocrisy. I don’t ever want to pretend to be something I’m not, especially just for someone to like or think highly of me. After all, Jesus is giving a strong warning when He said about being applauded by people, “truly I tell you, they have their reward” (Mat. 6:2). Could it be that if the applause of others is our purpose, then heaven isn’t our home? In any case I will seek to write with the caution of our Lord ever ringing in my head.

With this caution in mind let me take just a bit of time to explain where I am coming from with the task at hand. My training is in theology, applied theology, ethics, leadership and leadership theory, and history. I dedicated two of my graduate degrees in the humanities and then my doctorate in the social sciences. And I did all that for such a challenge as this. I am not a political scientist, nor a historian specializing in the American Revolution and the creation of America. I will do my best to stay in my lane. I will endeavor to lean on the credible works of historians, the breadth their research, and the correlation of noble ideals they have identified in the Declaration.

Still, one more word needs to be said regarding what this book ain’t. This is called delimitation and is the practice of explaining what the book is not about. It is a useful discipline which further helps to focus in on the central objective of the book. Therefore...

- This is not a work that wrestles through the different understandings and interpretations of patriotism throughout church history. We will use patriotism as a positive idea that refers to the passion, motivated by noble ideals, for the best version of our country.

³ L. Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 137 .

- This is not primarily a book on history, but rather a work of ethics. In other words, we will evaluate a historical document in an effort to extract the ideals that should inform our understanding of patriotism.
- It is not the principal goal of this work to critique the positive and negative aspects of historical leaders such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, etc.

Before we jump into Part One, please know one more thing about my perspective. I am grateful to God above that I was born and am a citizen of the United States of America. We live in a time where it seems popular to see our country in a negative light. It's all the rage to, well, rage against the red, white, and blue. This is the opposite of critical thinking. To buy into a narrative that America is inherently evil through-in-through is just as flawed as it is to believe that every sin she has committed can be explained away. To think critically about our country is to see the grander story of America and evaluate it in-depth, warts and all. To use critical thinking is an edifying act, whereas just being critical does nothing but tear down. In the following pages, I will seek to use critical thinking skills out of respect for the country of my birth.

I am proud to be an American. I love the freedoms we enjoy and this beautiful system of government called democracy. I hope in the chapters to come we will discover what it means to aspire to the most noble of ideals – a rediscovered patriotism – a kind that filters our earthly citizenship through our heavenly one.