

Could you explain why Philippians 3: 20 does not say Christians are going to Heaven when Jesus comes back?

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I'll do my best to help. The Philippian believers would have immediately understood Paul's metaphor. Philippi was a Roman colony. Dotted throughout the Empire were a number of these strategic military settlements, which often became great cities. In those strategic colonies, Roman dress was worn; the Latin language was spoken, Roman justice administered, Roman values enjoyed.

They were in fact, little outposts, living colonies of Rome who swore allegiance to Caesar. They were initially settled by retired soldiers who had served their time in the military. If they had been mercenaries from other nations, after 21 years they could retire with full Roman citizenship and enjoy the benefits of Rome in their new citizenship rights. And the great joy and honour of these colonies would be when the Roman Caesar visited them with his very *parousia*.

In these ways, Rome always came to the colony. Nobody imagined the colony would go to Rome! The colony derived its reason for existence, its very rationale, from mother Rome. Rome could exist, and did exist apart from and before any colony. No colony existed before Rome or apart from Rome. So the exegesis as far as I see it runs like this:

As Christians we derive our life, our hope, our future from Heaven. That is where our King, our Caesar, Jesus sits at the right hand of Father God waiting until the time of his *parousia*.

The text states clearly that we are waiting for the return of Jesus from heaven to earth where the 'action' is going to take place.

There is not a word here about us going to heaven. We will at that time be transformed and given immortal bodies for the task of transforming the governments of this world and indeed, all of nature. The sphere "**from which**" the hope is materialised is Heaven (**v.20**). Jesus comes **for** us by coming **to** us!

And when he comes all of Heaven's authority and power and glory comes with him to us! At that time the prayer of Jesus and his people ever since will be realised: God's Kingdom will be on earth as well as in Heaven. God's will is that His will be perfectly done right here on [a renewed, regenerated] earth. We can't wait for heaven's values, Heaven's laws, Heaven's language, Heaven's dress, Heaven's justice to be permanently set up in this new earth reflecting Heaven's God beautifully. Nobody imagined Philippi could go to Rome!

I understand the challenge for us to communicate this Biblically to our friends, when so much 'Christian' talk is about 'going to heaven when we die' and leaving this old earth behind and escaping to the sky, etc.

We are also up against it because our Western mindset easily clings to the 'mystical' and escapist theology all round us in the secular world too. The text says our hope comes "**from**" heaven, and it does *not* say it is to go "to heaven".

Why would our hope be to go up to Heaven when Jesus himself is going to be on this earth?