

He is risen. Happy Easter, so glad you are here. If you are a guest, thanks for coming. We realize that coming to church is always a little weird. We are honored you'd join us. What we do around here, is teach the Word. We believe that God is wiser than we are, so we just keep the book open. The Spirit promises to transform through the Book he authored. So we teach through books of the Bible, going verse by verse and paragraph by paragraph. We have been walking through Philippians. This is our 15th week and we'll be here till May. Today, we come to Phil 3:17-21 (922 . . . this is the Word). Three points this morning: Follow Good Examples, Avoid Bad Examples, Hope for the Resurrection.

I. Follow Good Examples 17 – Brothers, which includes sisters – the term is from the same womb – because the church is a family. Faith family, imitate me, Paul says. Specifically, imitate Paul's singular preoccupation: **3:4-16**. Be like Paul. Don't build your life on yourself. Build your life on Christ. Count all as loss compared to knowing Christ. Make it your aim to be found in him, to know him, to become like him. Singularly preoccupied. Be like Paul.

In other words, don't waste your life. Live for something larger than yourself. This is the reason you were created. Humanity's highest and supreme good is Jesus Christ. What are you living for? What is your highest good. What is the purpose of your life? Russian writer Leo Tolstoy: "My question, the one that brought me to the point of suicide when I was fifty years old, was a most simple one that lies in the soul of every person, from a silly child to a wise old man. It is the question without which life is impossible, as I had learnt from experience. It is this: what will come of what I do today or tomorrow? What will come of my entire life? Expressed another way the question can be put like this: why do I live? Why do I wish for anything, or do anything? Or expressed another way: is there any meaning in my life that will not be annihilated by the inevitability of death which awaits me?" Paul says follow examples that are living for realities that will matter, not just next month, not just next year, not just the next decade, but will matter 10K years from now.

Paul says follow the example you have in *us*. Who is the "us?" Keep your eyes on those who live this way. Philippians has already put three other examples before us besides Paul himself. Jesus: **2:3-8** (Cruciformity), **19-22, 25-30**. Imitate them as they imitate Christ. Christ is the true image of God, the model human, and he shows us how to live genuine lives, life and life abundantly. Matt 10:24-25: "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master." Jesus says, "Follow me." In John 13:1-17, Jesus washes . . . "I have given you an example, that you should do just as I have done to you." 1 Cor 10:33-11:1: "just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." Rom 15:1-3: "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself." / We follow Jesus and we follow those who follow Jesus, specifically in cruciform living. In other words, love.

Follow good examples.¹ We need to be around people whose passion is Christ. They spur us on. They build us up. This is why the local church is so important. God calls us to follow Christ together. We need one another. That is the way the Lord has designed this whole thing. I remember hearing the story of a pastor and a Christian who had not been faithful in coming to church. The pastor invited him out to a fire pit. The guy sat down. They didn't say a word. The old pastor was just poking at the fire. Then after a good while, he took a big coal and removed it from the fire. They just watched it begin to turn cold and dark. When it was just about out, he put it back with the other coals and it quickly rekindled. The man got up and said, "thanks for the message,

¹ Seneca in Harmon 370a

pastor.” You will die on the vine without the local church. I know church can be tough, but as many have said, the church is like Noah’s ark – it can sure smell like you know what but you’ll die outside of it. Or as Augustine put it: the church is a whore, but she is my mother. / We need to follow Christ-centered examples.

II. Avoid Bad Examples 18-19 – “For” – because. The reason you must follow good examples is because there are lots of bad ones. Be aware, awake, alert. Paul has often warned them. With tears. You see, Paul is broken about these bad examples and false teachers. There is no self-R superiority here. No condescension but rather contrition. He is broken over those who have gone astray. I wonder what your heart posture is toward those who are not following the Lord?

They are enemies of the cross of Christ. What does that mean? There is a lot of debate about who they are, but fundamentally, they are opposed to the way of Christ. One NT scholar writes, “Although no view is without its difficulties, on the whole it seems best to regard them as professing Christians, who because of their mindset on earthly things (3:19), lived a life of sinful indulgence rather than single-minded pursuit of Christ. Rather than take up their cross and follow Christ (Mark 8:34-38), they oppose it by gratifying the desires of their flesh.”²

Paul is broken for these enemies of the cross because he knows “there but for the grace of God go I.” He *was* an enemy of the cross before Christ opened his eyes. Friends, we must always remember, we as Christians are no better than anyone. To look down on lost people is to forget that you were once lost and it is only by grace that you’ve been found. It is hard to look down on people when you are on your knees before the foot of the cross.

V. 19 says, “Their end is destruction.” They are on a dead-end path. This word “destruction” was used in **1:28**. They’ll be destroyed if they don’t turn from their sin and to Christ. 1 Thess 5:2-3: “For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.”

“Their god is their belly.” What does that mean? It means they are driven by their appetites. Their god is their own warped desires. Rom 16:18: “For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites (same word – bellies), and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.” They have no self-control. / There may be an allusion to the food laws of the OC as well since there were Judaizers giving them trouble in Philippi (cf. 3:2, 3 Macc 7:11), trying to put them back under the OC Law. Their god is their belly. It reminds me of Edmund and his precious Turkish delight in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. “The more he ate the more he wanted to eat (37) . . . Anyone who had once tasted it would want more and more of it, and would even, if they were allowed, go on eating it till they killed themselves (38) . . . he wanted to taste that Turkish Delight again more than he wanted anything else” (42). Driven by appetite. The belly does not think; it simply wants. The belly desires, the belly craves; it is the place where our animal needs and appetites dwell.

“They glory in their shame.” They are proud of things they should be ashamed of. Notice the contrast with Christians – **3:2-3**. We don’t glory in shameful things. We glory in Christ Jesus. He is our boast. / “Their minds are set on earthly things.” They are worldly. Here is their fundamental issue. They are living for this world rather than the world to come. James 4:4: friendship with the world means enmity against God. Remember

² Harmon, 372-73.

David Wells' definition: "Worldliness is that system of values, in any given age, which has at its center our fallen human perspective, which displaces God and his truth from the world, and which makes sin look normal and righteousness seem strange." They are worldly. Minds set on earthly things.

And our minds are set on Christ, not worldly things. This word for "minds" is that same word we keep seeing: φρονέω. They have an earthly worldview/mindset and we have a Christ-centered worldview. Rom 8:5-8: "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." / Contrast these enemies of the cross with who we are: we are friends of the cross – for it, formed by it, our end is not destruction but resurrection, our god is not our belly, our minds are set on things above.

III. Hope for the Resurrection (Now we get to Easter Sunday 20-21) – **20** - Our citizenship is in heaven. Philippi was a Roman colony so citizenship was a big deal. The word for citizenship means political activity or action. So they are not merely Roman citizens, and we are not merely U.S. citizens. We have a dual citizenship. We are an outpost of the Kingdom of Christ, an embassy of heaven. **1:27**.

The very early Christian letter known as *The Epistle to Diognetus* calls us pilgrims and foreigners. It says, "They live in their own countries, but only as nonresidents; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign" (6.5).

We are citizens of heaven. By definition, citizenship is a corporate concept. It is to be lived out with and among fellow citizens. The local church is vital to faithful living. Look again at **1:27-28**. Friend, if you are not a member of a local church, let me challenge you to find one and plug in. You're already here so let me give you a 3 week challenge. Come back here, for 3 weeks. Including today, a month of Sundays – and see what the Lord may do.

Faithful citizens of a colony embody the values of the homeland, promote the interests their mother city, maintain the dignity of where their true priorities lie. So, unlike the enemies of the cross, our minds are not set on earthly but heavenly things: **Col 3:1-4**.

Our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior. This direction is important. He is going to come back here. / Jesus Christ is the Savior. Rome called the emperor a savior. Same word: *soter*. It normally referred to political leaders who secured and ensured the welfare of their citizens. For example, in 17 BC Augustus Caesar decreed the following: "Salvation is to be found in no other but Augustus, and there is no other name given to men in which they can be saved." Maybe that sounds familiar? Peter just exchanges the names. He swaps Jesus for Augustus.³ Doug Moo writes, "Paul uses his political vocabulary in order to talk about the church as a distinctive body under Christ's authority" (314).

³ Lusk 352.

Jesus, not Caesar, is the Savior.⁴ What do we need saving from? Satan, sin, death, and hell. We can't save ourselves. We need a Savior and that is what God has provided. He has provided for our greatest need! D.A. Carson writes, "If God had perceived that our greatest need was economic, he would have sent an economist. If he had perceived that our greatest need was entertainment, he would have sent us a comedian or an artist. If God had perceived that our greatest need was political stability, he would have sent us a politician. If he had perceived that our greatest need was health, he would have sent us a doctor. But he perceived that our greatest need involved our sin, our alienation from him, our profound rebellion, our death; and he sent us a Savior."

This Savior is the Lord Jesus Christ. "Jesus is Lord" is the basic Christian confession but it was at odds with the basic Roman confession, which was Kaiser Kyrios – Caesar is Lord. So, when Christians professed Jesus is Lord they were also saying Caesar is not. That's what got them in trouble. The Roman historian Tacitus records how Christians were punished for refusing to claim that Caesar is Lord. In Acts 17, the disciples are accused of "acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king, Jesus." There is, and Christians have a distinctive allegiance. Jesus is Lord. He came, he died, he conquered death, he rose, he was enthroned at the right hand of God. He is the King. Christ is not Jesus' last name, but a title. "Christ" is a claim not a name. It means anointed King. He is the Lord. He is the King. **2:8-11**. Friend, you will bow and acknowledge that Jesus is King. That is not the question. The question is will you bow now in glad and grateful humility. Or will you refuse to bow in this life and be forced to bow on judgment day? But bow you will. You cannot remain neutral toward Jesus. And he is worth giving your life to.

We await a Savior. The word can be translated eagerly await. Paul uses it over in Rom 8:19: the creation waits with eager longing for redemption, 8:23 – we wait eagerly for the redemption of our bodies, 8:25 we wait with patience. Christians are a forward-looking people. Calvin said, "Let us, however, consider this settled: that no one has made progress in the school of Christ who does not joyfully await the day of death and final resurrection." We are not settled here. We are waiting. One of humanities most fundamental questions is "where do I belong?" Is this all there is? You know, there must be more. C.S. Lewis said, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." We are waiting for another world.

And what will this Savior-King do when he comes? **21**. He will transform our bodies. He will give us resurrection bodies. He will transform our body of humility into a body like his glory. "Lowly body" is not the most helpful way of putting it. Paul means the body that belongs to the state of humiliation. NASB: "who will transform the body of our lowly condition." 1 Cor 15:42-43: "So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power."

How will the Savior King bring resurrection? "By the power that enables him to subject all things to himself." Here is how the NLT puts it: "He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control." This is a quotation of Psalm 8, which is a very important Psalm, one of God's favorites since it is quoted so often in the NT. Ps 8 is a

⁴ Gupta writes, "Paul proclaims the future visitation of the Savior Lord Jesus to bring comfort to the Philippian Christians, to fortify their wills and to call them to perseverance in representing well their home-country in a strange land – because they will be rewarded, vindicated, and honored when Jesus comes to put all things right. Eventually, every knee will bow and every tongue confess 'Lord Jesus Christ,' God the Father be praised. Believers will be proven right in their commitment to the 'gospel way' so to speak, if they stay faithful to their commonwealth. The ultimate victory of Christ as 'savior' will make this apparent to all." *Living the King Jesus Gospel*, 74-75.

commentary on Gen 1 about the creation of humanity. **Ps 8**. So, Ps 8 is about the glory of being a human: we have been given the honor, status, and vocation of ruling on God's behalf. But here in Phil 3, Paul applies Ps 8 to Jesus. This is not the only place he does that (Eph 1, Heb 2). Why? Because Jesus is the true image of God, the truly human one who is restoring our humanity. We fell short of the glory for which we were made and it is being restored in Christ. He is remaking you into a true human, that which you were made for.

To summarize, Psalm 8 is a commentary about Genesis 1. It is a reflection on what it means to be made in the image of God and given the task to rule and have dominion over the earth on God's behalf. The Psalmist describes that as being given the honorable status of glory. This is what Paul means by our body of low estate being transformed into a body made for glory: made for ruling and reigning with Christ on the new world.

Christ is subjecting all things to himself. That is what he is doing now. Theologians call it his present reign. **1 Cor 15:20-28**. Jesus is the risen and reigning King. Submit to him, trust him, follow him, give allegiance to him. He is subduing all things and will one day make all things new. God's plan of redemption is not to save us out of the world but to save the world. Not rescue *from* but transformation *of*. Resurrection. New bodies on a new world. Easter attire.

Our notions of heaven are often more Gnostic than Christian. Gnostics taught that the body was just a prison from which the soul needs liberation. The physical is bad but the spiritual is good. But God created a good world and he will redeem it. Maybe you have heard, this world is not my home I am just passing through. Biblically, it is more like heaven is not my home, I will just be passing through. Heaven, with disembodied souls, is temporary. A new earth with resurrection bodies is eternal. We await a Savior from heaven. If you were a Roman citizen living in Philippi, your hope was not "going to Rome when you died." No, your hope was bringing Rome to Philippi – meaning bringing Rome's way of life, values, culture, governance to Phillip where you lived. Being heavenly minded is not dreaming of harps and obese babies in the sky but bringing heaven – the life of heaven the culture of heaven, the rule of heaven to earth. Our heavenly citizenship shapes all we do here below.⁵

Lewis: "A continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither."
3:20-21.

Benediction – "Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Heb 13:20-21)

⁵ Lusk, 177.