

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **The Heavenly Processional Philippians 3:17-21 Part 3**

Often times after a funeral service there is a procession to the cemetery and this procession is very difficult to miss. Typically you will have a black hearse leading the procession, followed by a chauffeur driven black limousine, which is finally followed by a long line of cars with headlights on.

Though you may have seen funeral processions many times I would doubt if any of you would be tempted to become a part of that procession if you did not have any personal reason for doing so.

But there is another procession that hopefully everyone here this weekend will want to be a part of. And what is that procession? It is the heavenly processional or in other words “the resurrection from the dead” processional. It is that procession that will ultimately lead those who are a part of it into perfect conformity to Christ in the glory of heaven.

There have always been people throughout the centuries since the church was born that have been very steadily and consistently pressing forward toward that goal. They are the heavenly processional. They are not difficult to spot. They are not difficult to identify.

And hopefully after our study of the passage we will be considering for the next several weeks you will see the importance of identifying these individuals.

Let me read this passage for you **Philippians 3:17-21** “**Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. (18) For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, (19) whose end is destruction, whose God is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. (20) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; (21) who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.**”

Though this passage has no grammatical connection with what has preceded it, the passage clearly has a logical connection to **Philippians 3:12-16**.

**Philippians 3:12-16** was all about pressing forward toward the goal of being a participant in the resurrection from the dead and living a life consistent with that goal. **Philippians 3:17-21** in essence is all about the same thing. It will simply repackage the same theme in a little different way. Paul’s repackaging will give us the opportunity to learn some new things about this heavenly procession that is presently passing through this world.

I would hope that our study of this passage will once again help us to focus us on things that are truly important and encourage us to pursue the things which have eternal value.

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The question that I will be seeking to answer beginning this weekend is: What can we learn about the heavenly processional from Philippians 3:17-21? The first thing that we learn is that .....

We are commanded to follow those who by the way they are living demonstrate they are in the heavenly procession.

Paul wants us to get behind the right car in the heavenly processional. If we do not get behind the right car we may not reach the goal of being a participant in the resurrection from the dead. If we do not get behind the right car, rather than ending up at the resurrection from the dead or in other words the resurrection of life, we might end up at the resurrection of judgment. This would be a serious mistake.

Let us begin by reading **Philippians 3:17**, **“Brethren, join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”** What is the first thing that stands out to us?

In **Philippians 3:17** we see people following one another as in a procession. They are not headed to a grave sight as we might find in a funeral procession. No! They are headed to an event and to a place that is beyond the grave. The procession that we see in **Philippians 3:17** is a heavenly procession which is moving forward toward the resurrection from the dead and ultimate conformity to Christ in glory. There are three separate groups in this heavenly processional.

The first group in this procession is referred to as “us” in Philippians 3:17 and would include Paul and most likely his missionary associates Epaphroditus and Timothy. Let me read the verse for you, **“Brethren, join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in “me” (no, “according to the pattern you have in us”).** There really is not much debate who the “us” refers to. The “us” refers to Paul and his missionary friends Epaphroditus and Timothy. These two men have already been highlighted in this epistle and certainly were the two people he most closely identified himself with in the book of Philippians.

Paul begins this verse by commanding all of the professing believers at Philippi to follow his personal example but because of the way he finishes the verse with the pronoun “us” we know that the example he is commanding them to follow in respect to himself is the same example that Epaphroditus and Timothy consistently portray to anyone that would cross their path as well. So in essence when Paul commands the Philippians to follow his example he is commanding the Philippians to follow the example of Epaphroditus and Timothy as well.

So who is the lead group in this heavenly processional? The first group is referred to as “us” and would include Paul and most likely Epaphroditus and Timothy. It is this group’s example that the Philippians were commanded to follow. But this is not the only group that Paul is calling all the professing believers of Philippi to follow.

The second group in this procession is “those who walk according to the pattern you have in us” (Philippians 3:17). So Paul and his missionary friends are out front in this heavenly processional followed closely by another group of believers who are living just like Paul and his associates.

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Let us again look at the verse, “**Brethren, join in following my example (and the example of the men serving with me) and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.**”

This second group is an extremely important group. We know this because Paul commands all the professing believers at Philippi to observe those living in the very same way as Paul and his associates. He is saying, if you see people who are following us so closely as to be stepping on our heels, I am commanding you to observe them.

The word “observe” (SKOPEO) conveys the idea of close observation, or fixed attention. Paul wants the Philippians to identify those who are following the example of Paul and his missionary friends. Paul wants the Philippians to identify those who are walking according to the pattern that they have seen in the lives of Paul and his associates and to watch them intently.

Where will we find these people? In a nearby state or city? No! These people would be close by! They would be people in the church of Philippi.

Why is he commanding them to do this? He is commanding them to do this because their close observation of those living according to the pattern of Paul and his associates will enable the Philippians to follow the example of Paul, even though Paul and his associates may not be with them. And if they will do this they can be assured that they in fact will end up exactly where Paul and associates are going to end up, which is the resurrection of the dead and enjoying perfect conformity to Christ.

We need to do the same thing. Paul and his associates are not with us, but we can follow them in this heavenly processional by following people in our church who are walking according to the pattern of Paul and his friends.

What would be some of the characteristics that we should be looking for in the lives of those following closely the pattern of Paul and his associates? We don’t have to go very far in order to find some of these characteristics. We have already considered some of them in **Philippians 3.**

Those following the pattern of Paul and his associates will have exercised faith in Christ and have entered into a personal relationship with Him (Philippians 3:7-8); In other words they will have made the adjustment to their spiritual ledger that we talked about in **Philippians 3:7-8.** And what was that adjustment? Those making this adjustment to their spiritual ledger will transfer everything that they ever valued or thought important from the gain column and move it to the loss column and Christ who they at one time considered worse than worthless would be transferred to their gain column. At the very moment someone does this as an expression of their faith they immediately enter into a personal relationship with Christ and join the heavenly processional.

Who should we be looking to follow in the church? We should be looking for people in the church who have made a profession of faith in Christ . You might say that everyone here this weekend would fall into this category. I wish this were true, but I know for a fact that this is not so. There are people who attend our church who may have a very high view of Christ but have not yet come to the place in their lives where they are willing to make that profession of faith in Christ and therefore have entered into a personal relationship with Him.

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But even beyond this there is another problem. Even if you were able to identify people in this congregation who have made a verbal profession of faith in Christ that profession could be an empty profession. It could very well be that they have never made the adjustment to their spiritual ledger that they would need to make if genuine, living, saving faith is going to be exercised.

This means that we need to look for more than just a profession of faith in Christ if we are going to identify those who are in the heavenly processional. What is a second characteristic.

Those following the pattern of Paul and his associates will confirm their faith by wanting to get to know Christ better (Philippians 3:8-11). This makes perfect sense. If we have truly made the adjustment that we need to make in our spiritual ledger as an expression of genuine, living, saving faith and we have therefore in fact come into a personal relationship with Christ then we will want to get to know Christ better. And this is exactly what we saw in the life of Paul. Remember **Philippians 3:10**. What did Paul say? **“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.”** Those that know Christ and who have joined the heavenly processional will want to get to know Christ better.

They will want to experience the power that raised Christ from the dead as they are transformed from glory to glory. In other words they will want to experience the power that raised Christ from the dead as they continually see new areas of sin in their lives defeated as they become more like Christ. But not only will they want to experience this power as they see their lives getting better and better.

They will also be desiring to know Him better in respect to the fellowship of his sufferings. They are willing to participate with Christ in His sufferings as Christ builds His church. This does not only mean that they are willing to put themselves in a position to be persecuted but they are also willing and even desiring to put themselves in a position to suffer in respect to the expenditure of their time, energy and resources.

Who should you be looking to follow in the church if we are going to assure ourselves that we have joined the heavenly processional? We should be looking to follow those who not only have made a profession of faith in Christ, but those who by the way they are living demonstrate that they want to know Christ better.

But we are not done, Paul gives us another set of characteristics in **Philippians 3:12-16**.

Those following the pattern of Paul and his associates will be dissatisfied, directed, and disciplined Philippians 3:12-16). Those following the pattern of Paul and his associates will be spiritually dissatisfied because they will not have experienced the resurrection from the dead and perfect conformity to Christ, this dissatisfaction will then lead them to establish a focused direction, which will then lead them to a disciplined life as they seek to march in line with the teachings of God's word.

Who should you be looking to follow in the church today? We should not only be looking to follow those who not only have made a profession of faith in Christ, and who by the way they are living their lives demonstrate that they want to know Christ better, but who are doggedly determined to continue to press on, to endure and persevere to the very end.

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The Philippians were being commanded to observe those among them who were walking according to the pattern of Paul and his associates. Or in other words according to the characteristics that I have just outlined for you. We need to do the same.

Not only do we need to know what these characteristics are if we are in fact going to identify them. We need to put ourselves in a position to look for these characteristics if we are actually trying to fulfill this command. Some professing Christians are not taking this command seriously.

In order to fulfill this command any notion of keeping ourselves at a safe distance from Christians cannot be tolerated. If we take what Paul is saying seriously then we will need to get close enough to professing Christians so that we can actually see the characteristics that would identify them as walking according to the pattern of Paul and his associates. There is a vast number of professing Christians in America who could care less about obeying this command. How we do know this?

There are many professing Christians in America who have chosen to stay away from the church and the assembly of the saints. They do not think of this as particularly significant, but what is the problem? They are getting a long way away from the heavenly processional and those who like Paul and his associates are pressing forward toward the goal of the resurrection from the dead. And when they get so far away from the processional they begin to look more like a bystander than a participant.

There are many other professing Christians in America who have chosen to stay away from the church and the assembly of the saints most of the time and only come when it is convenient. They do not think of this as particularly significant, but what is the problem? But they are getting a long way away from the heavenly processional and those who like Paul and his associates are pressing forward toward the goal of the resurrection from the dead. And when they get so far away from the processional they begin to look more like a bystander than a participant.

There are still other Christians who purpose to attend church and even attend regularly, but who make sure that they don't get too close to the people in the church. They do not think of this as particularly significant, but what is the problem? They are getting a long way away from the heavenly processional and those who like Paul and his associates are pressing forward toward the goal of the resurrection from the dead. And when they get so far away from the processional they begin to look more like a bystander than a participant.

In order to fulfill Paul's command to observe those who were following the pattern of Paul and his associates requires a close relationship with the church family (Hebrews 13:17). Why? Because Paul and his associates had a very close relationship with the church family, those who are following the pattern of Paul and his associates will therefore have a very close relationship with the church family. Therefore we need to have a very close relationship with the church family if we are going to observe them.

Hopefully understanding this and desiring to be obedient to the commands in **Philippians 3:17** you will do to all that you can be become involved in our church family at Valley Bible Church. How can this be done.

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Attend church services whenever possible.

Get involved in a small group.

Get involved in ministry of our church.

Invite people from our church over to your house just to get better acquainted.

I know that everyone that attends Valley has flaws and imperfections, but I also know that among the saints of Valley Bible Church there are many people who are attending this fellowship who are walking according to the pattern of Paul and his associates. It is your responsibility before the Lord to find them and then to walk according to the pattern that you see in their lives. If you do this then you become a part of the third group in the heavenly processional.

The third group in the procession are professing Christians at Philippi who responded to the commands of Paul “to follow” and “to observe.” What does **Philippians 3:17** say? **“Brethren (all of you amongst the professing Christians at Philippi who I have come to know and love) join in following my example (this is not an option this is a command) and observe (which is also a command) those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”** If all the Philippians would respond to these commands which I believe the apostle Paul expects, they will become the third group in this heavenly processional.

Let me ask you a question. Who are you presently observing closely and watching intently those who are walking according to the pattern of the Apostle Paul and his associates? Hopefully you could very dogmatically say that you are.

I have been so blessed to be surrounded by so many of these kind of believers. Not just Christians who say that they a part of the heavenly processional, but who are demonstrating that they are a part of the heavenly processional by the way they are living.

### CONCLUSION

We have all seen funeral processions. They are easy to spot. But there is another processional that is also very easy to spot and that is the heavenly processional. Are we close enough to it that we can be assured that we are a part of it? Are we so far removed from the processional and those who are pressing forward toward the goal of the resurrection that we look more like a bystander than a participant?