

**BROKEN CHAINS**  
**The Philippians Series #13**  
**Philippians 4:5b-7**

**(ADDITIONAL COMMENTARY)**

**THE LORD IS NEAR**

In our last study we arrived at one of the great promises of Philippians; that the peace of God which transcends all understanding will stand guard over our hearts and minds. Indeed, this is one of the greatest promises found in the entire Bible. In this current chapter I want us to look a little deeper into the promises of Philippians 4:5-7. There is so much to see in these verses that we could never hope to exhaustively cover it all. A central element of the peace that is promised in 4:7 is the manner in which it is connected with this little phrase in 4:5: **THE LORD IS NEAR.**

When I preached the sermon for this passage I did not explore “The Lord is near” as referring to the return of Christ. The Bible clearly teaches that some day the Lord will return for His people (see John 14:1-3; Acts 1:6-11) and that we should find this promise to be a source of joy, encouragement and peace in our hearts and minds (I Thessalonians 5:17-18; I John 3:1-3). In no way do I want to rule out the possibility that when Paul wrote to the Philippians, “The Lord is near”, he was thinking about the Lord’s promise to return. Every generation of Christians from the first day until now have been justified in believing that they could be alive to witness the Lord’s return. While I believe the phrase “The Lord is near” can include the thought of Christ’s visible return, I do not believe the phrase is exclusively limited to that thought. Let’s see what else it means.

“The Lord is near” certainly includes the central thought of what it means to experience the presence of God. The Bible has much to say about the presence of God, and grasping the big picture will go a long way to helping us capture the meaning of Philippians 4:5.

Have you ever noticed the similarities between Genesis 1 and Revelation 22? These are the very first and the very last chapters of the Bible and they both highlight the profound truth of people enjoying the direct presence of God. In Genesis 1-2, before sin ruined everything, being in the presence of God was the most wonderful thing imaginable. In Revelation 21-22, after Christ has fixed everything, the presence of God is the most wonderful thing imaginable. And yet according to Philippians 4:5, Christians have, in some way, the present assurance and experience of God’s presence in their lives. “The Lord is near”. To recognize what this means is instrumental in experiencing the peace spoken of in 4:7.

We must not take this lightly. It is easy to take what seems to be abstract theoretical concepts such as “The Lord is near” and be unmoved by them. May God deliver us from the foolishness of minimizing the impact of this great promise.

Let's begin with considering what the Bible says about the presence of God being a terrifying thing. We are mere creatures, and we are sinful. He is the eternally self-existent Creator and is completely sinless and holy. Even the godliest of people (and I am not one of them) are terrified when they experience His unfiltered presence. Isaiah 6:1-5 says,

*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne,  
high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.  
Above Him were seraphs, each with six wings:  
With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet,  
and with two they were flying.  
And they were calling to one another:  
Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.  
At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook  
and the temple was filled with smoke.  
"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips,  
and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."*

Isaiah was a righteous and godly man, but when he saw the LORD directly he was terrified. It is important to know that John 12:41 identifies Jesus as the One whom Isaiah saw. Speaking of Jesus, read Revelation 1:12-17.

*I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me.  
And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands,  
and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man",  
dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash around His chest.  
His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire.  
His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of rushing waters.  
In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.  
His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.  
When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead.  
Then He placed His right hand on me and said:  
"Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last."*

The Apostle John had lived with Jesus and followed Him during Jesus' earthly ministry. Of the original 12 disciples, John might have been the one who was Jesus' closest friend (John 13:21-25). But even though John was an Apostle, until Revelation 1:12-17 he had never seen Jesus in His full glory. When John did see Jesus, he fell to the ground as though dead, and Jesus had to comfort John; "Do not be afraid".

If the presence of God is this terrifying for Christians whose sins have been forgiven, what must it be like for non-Christians? We are given a glimpse of this in Revelation 6:15-17.

*Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty,  
and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains.  
They called to the mountains and the rocks,  
"Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!  
For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"*

These are amazing verses, aren't they? And we could point to several others that make the same point. Now then, how is "The Lord is near" in Philippians 4:5 supposed to help us experience the peace (shalom) of God?

There are numerous places in the Bible where the presence of God brings great comfort to God's people. Think of the great 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. It is one of the most beloved portions of the entire Bible:

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
He leads me beside quiet waters,  
He restores my soul.  
He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil, for **you are with me**;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

How can we not love those words, "I will fear no evil, for you are with me"? Other passages I would encourage you to read are Joshua 1:5-9; Isaiah 41:8-10; Ezekiel 48:35 together with Revelation 21:1-4; John 1:14 and John 20:19-20. When Paul told the Philippian believers "The Lord is near", he intended for this to comfort and encourage them and to help them experience the peace of God. I can think of few things that encourage me more than to know that God is always with me. ALWAYS. Though others might leave me or forsake me, He never will!

There does seem to be a contradiction though, doesn't there? How do we reconcile all the verses that speak of how terrifying God's presence is with all the other verses that tell us how comforting God's presence is? The glorious answer to this question is found in the person of Jesus Christ and the work He did for us on the cross. Rightly understood, we can see that those agonizing hours He spent on the cross are the focal point of all human history. Everything in the Bible prior to the crucifixion was pointing to the cross, and everything in the Bible after the crucifixion looks back to the cross.

There are many wonderful passages of Scripture that shed light on what the cross means. Isaiah 53:4-6 says that the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him. Christ bore upon Himself the righteous wrath of God that should have been ours, for we were guilty of sin and He was not. Our guilt has been removed (Psalm 103:10-12; I John 2:1-2). The presence of God has gone from being a terrifying thing (because of our sin, guilt and unworthiness in contrast to His holiness) to being a comforting thing. Romans 5:1-2 says:

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith,  
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
through whom we have gained access by faith  
into this grace in which we now stand.  
And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*

The Hebrew word for peace is shalom, and it refers to the great blessing and comfort of being in right relationship with God. Paul's letter was written in Greek, but I have no doubt (since he was Jewish) that Paul was thinking in terms of shalom.=

Finally, remember that God's peace does not mean there will never be trials or storms. What the Bible promises is that even when the storms of life are most violent, we can have peace for the Lord is near. He is in the boat with us!

**BROKEN CHAINS**

**DIGGING DEEPER**

1. What happened in Genesis 3:8-10 that changed Adam and Eve's response to the presence of God?

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2. Why does God allow His people to experience storms and trials?

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3. Read Mark 4:35-41. What lesson(s) are there for you in this passage?

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4. How often do you think about God's presence in your life? Do you think you need to be more mindful of this promise more frequently? What practical steps can you take to grow in this area?

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5. Is there something in my life (unconfessed sin, unhealthy focus on circumstances) that is blocking or hindering your sense of the Lord's nearness to you and causing you to forfeit the blessings of experiencing His being near? What changes should you make?

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