

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 3 Issue 8

February 29, 2004

The Lord is Near

The Steadfast Christian Part 7

It was unthinkable! The young man whom God used to deliver His people from the Philistines¹, whom King Saul brought into his palace as one of his very own children², whose heart beat with God's³, who would pour out his soul in print thus giving us the words to say in times of struggle⁴, and who eventually would become the standard for what it meant to be a great king in the eyes of the Lord⁵ would find himself fleeing for his life because Saul sought to kill him.⁶

Now, in the movies, the idea of fleeing for your life might sound exciting. However, for David, it became a source of great trial and difficulty as he was bereft of friends, family, support and encouragement. He was bereft of the fellowship of God's people. He was bereft of the worship of God.

And yet, trial and difficulty can have a purifying effect. We read these words of David:

Psalm 119:71, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."

Psalm 57:1, "Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast."

Even though David encountered many difficulties in his day, based upon what he wrote, I know that he would not have exchanged any of them. They were the portal unto a life of deep communion with God. And they were the means whereby he fellowshiped with the Lord.

There is no greater privilege in all the world than to be seated at Christ's feet! Accordingly, listen to the goal Paul had in writing to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 7:35 (NASB), "And this I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord."

¹ Compare 1 Samuel 17

² Compare 1 Samuel 18:2

³ Compare 1 Samuel 13:14

⁴ Compare various Psalms

⁵ Compare 1 Kings 15:11; 2 Kings 14:3; Amos 6:5; Zechariah 12:8

⁶ Compare 1 Samuel 21:10

Paul was not seeking after their external obedience to the Lord. Paul longed for them to enjoy a relationship of deep communion with God.

Such has been the passion of men and women throughout redemptive history. They have desired undistracted devotion, deep and abiding fellowship with Christ. This was Korah's passion.

Psalm 84:10, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

Do you understand what the "tents of wickedness" are? They are a place where the passing pleasures of sin⁷ are richly enjoyed.

Do you understand the path that leads to fellowshiping with the Lord? The path to deep abiding fellowship is the dark valley filled with sorrow and bitterness.⁸

Yet Korah would willingly give up the best that this world could offer simply to stand at the door of a worship service. This was his longing for Christ! It was the consolation that God gave to the Old Testament priesthood who could not own house, land, or farm.

Numbers 18:20, "And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: **I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.**"

Many Old Testament saints anticipated land or gold upon the death of their parents. However the priest's inheritance was God!

No doubt inspired by the inheritance of the priesthood, Asaph wrote these words:

Psalm 73:25-26, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

Let goods and kindred go! I want Christ! There is no greater privilege or blessing in this world than to commune with Christ. Draw near to Him. Sit at His feet. Lay your head upon His breast. Fellowship with Him!

Thus in our passage Paul exhorts Euodias and Syntyche unto a life of communion with the Lord.

The Call to Commune

Philippians 4:6, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

From this we saw that Paul is exhorting the Philippians to cultivate a walk with God such that when difficult times come that they should go to God with their burdens, cares, and concerns of life as well as

⁷ Compare Hebrews 11:25

⁸ Compare Lamentation 3:15

their victories, failures, defeats, pains and sorrows. Instead of going to man, we are to “let our requests be made known to God.” IT'S A CALL TO COMMUNION! How radical!

Isaiah 64:4, “For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.”

See the gods of the nations which surrounded Israel may wrongly have been attributed with power, strength, and might. Yet, NONE were understood as ones who took pleasure in drawing near to man and communing with him!

However, this is the God to whom we belong. Thus, when we pray, we say, “Our Father.” When we read the word, we climb into His lap. Wherever we go, we are to “walk by the Spirit.” And thus when we hurt and find that we are at the end of ourselves, we are to “let our requests be made known to God.”⁹ This is our call to communion.

Yet as one's whose hearts want to flee from God when we sin, how do we cultivate this life of communion?

The Conduit for Communion

Philippians 4:6, “Be careful for nothing; **but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known unto God.”

Each of these words revolves around the concept of dependence which is the key to communing with the Lord. When Adam and Eve sinned against God along with wanting to be like God, they also endeavored to be independent from Him. Though God's word said, “Don't eat!” Nevertheless they sought freedom from the Lord's authority such that they could do what seemed to be wise in their own eyes.

Our natural passion is to go it alone. We desire to stand on our own two feet. And this passion accompanies us today wherever we go. This passion wages war against any attempt that we might make at communing with God.

If we want to cultivate an intimate love relationship with the Lord, we must cultivate a life of dependence upon Him. This means that we are in the business of ever and always allowing the trials of life to have their way in weaning us from self-trust to reliance upon God.

This is what we are about as children of God. When the heat is on and life gets tough, we rejoice because we know that it will create in us a greater hunger for the Lord!

What is the likelihood that we are going to succeed here? I mean, we're so sinful. What hope is there that we actually will seek the Lord in the fire?

This brings us to the encouragement.

Encouragement to Commune

⁹ Compare Philippians 4:6

Philippians 4:5, “Let your moderation be known unto all men. **The Lord is at hand**¹⁰.”

Such profound words! The primary idea is not that the Lord's Second Coming is near, even though this is true. The idea is that the Lord Himself is ever and always near His children.¹¹

This is such a glorious truth that serves as the bridge between the exhortation that Paul gave in verse 4 to forbear with one another and the call in verses 6-7 to commune with God.

What hope have you that you will grow in your communion with the Lord? Paul would say, “Because Christ is near!”

The Road to Emmaus

In Luke 24 Christ had just been crucified and was in the grave for three days. The disciples were shattered. Judas Iscariot was a devil. Ten fled for their lives when Christ was captured. And Peter openly denied Christ,

Matthew 26:74, “Then began he to curse [may God condemn me to hell if I am lying] and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.”

Now in the midst of this confusion and turmoil, two heretofore unknown disciples are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, heavy-ladened!

Luke 24:15-16, “And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him”

A discourse begins between Christ and these two disciples in which Christ forces the men to relate their misunderstanding of all that took place.¹² In response, the Lord opened the Scriptures and began relating to them the truth about a suffering Messiah and much, much more.

Luke 24:27, “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”

Well, never since Christ walked the earth has a man been able to teach as this “Stranger” on the road, and so the two disciples invite Him to stay with them. Christ was willing and so all three enter an inn for the night.

Luke 24:3-32, “And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”

Do you see the point?

These disciples did not discover Christ. Christ discovered them! As they walked on the road to Emmaus

¹⁰ εγγυς eggus

¹¹ Compare Matthew 28:20, Psalm 145:18, Psalm 34:18, and Psalm 73:28

¹² Compare Luke 24:17-24

— a road upon which you and I have traveled before — the presence of their Lord not only meant that they grew in their understanding. They also grew in fellowship. They grew in deep, rich communion with Christ. And they had a spiritual warming to the Lord despite the disparity of their circumstances!

Psalm 73:28, “**But it is good for me to draw near to God:** I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.”

And that is the encouragement we have. The Lord is near such that He ever and always will keep, comfort, direct, and guide us into green pastures!

Let us derive great comfort and encouragement from this truth! Walking with you this very moment is Another — His name is Christ the Lord. He never will fail you or forsake you! And thus, though our days be difficult and long, Euodias or Syntyche may have crushed your spirit, and we may have proven ourselves quite unfaithful. Nevertheless, the One who walks with us, and He who has begun a good work in us will indeed complete it.¹³

In light of this I ask how can we be down-cast when the Lord is so near?

We can only be down-cast if we allow the storms of life to distract us from looking at Him.¹⁴

When this happens, what should we do?

We can go into turmoil because we failed Him yet again. Or we could curse God and die? Or we could complain about the size or presence of the waves.

No! Rather we should call out with Peter.

Matthew 14:30, “But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, **Lord, save me.**”

Family of God, when the nearness of Christ is the focus of your life, the nearness of God truly is your good.

The Consequences of Nearness

Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts¹⁵ and minds¹⁶ through Christ Jesus.”

We have quoted this verse for all our saved lives, yet what does it mean?

In essence, the nearness of God is for your good. You must depend upon Him in all things, and when you cultivate a heart of communion with the Lord, God will station a “guard” at the door of your “heart” and “mind” whose sole purpose will be to protect you.

¹³ Compare Philippians 1:6

¹⁴ Compare Matthew 14:30

¹⁵ καρδια kardia

¹⁶ υμων humon

This is an incredible truth! As you know, Philippi was a Roman colony. As such it had a garrison which not only protected the city from attack, it also made sure that the will of Caesar would be accomplished in Philippi. Accordingly to the Philippian citizen, this garrison would be a source of great comfort. They could rest at ease knowing that when it came to their safety and security, someone was always on duty.

Brothers and sisters, the word that Paul uses here for “guard” was one and the same as the word that would have been used to refer to the garrison in Philippi. So when a person relies upon Christ such that he approaches Him for fellowship and communion, God stations a guard over them to protect two very important commodities.

Guards Your Heart

The first of these commodities is your heart. In the Hebrew view, the heart is the center of one's being. Out of the heart flows all of life.¹⁷ It is that which is responsible for our affections and the many other things we might do emotively.¹⁸ It is thus over our affections that God has set a guard.

And how thankful we ought to be! When one looks at the Old Testament people of God in their darkest times, often we read that they “took their ball and went home” when it came to the Lord. They abandoned God to worship the god of ease and comfort. There is no doubt that I would do the same if it wasn't for this guard that God has set over my heart.

Yet, God doesn't just guard our heart and affections. He also guards our minds.

Guards Your Mind

The term rendered mind in this passage is not the normal word used for mind. Rather, it references the concrete expression or activity of the mind, that is, our thoughts.

Again, this is a wonderful blessing. Posted close to all our thought processes, our wills, and that which formulates and molds our convictions is a guard who won't allow us to go whoring after the nations.

Praise God for this guard! When the thought comes to my mind like “walk away from it all” or “it would be easier if I wasn't saved” or “God can't be love if He could allow this” the guard says, “No!”

Yet, what is this guard's name?

Verse 7 tells us his name is, “the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension.” Let's look at this more closely.

The Peace of God

Philippians 4:6, “**And the peace¹⁹ of God**, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

¹⁷ Compare Mark 7:21

¹⁸ Compare Philippians 1:7; Romans 9:2; Romans 10:1; and 2 Corinthians 2:4

¹⁹ εἰρήνη eirene

This is not the objective peace that Christ created between God and man when our Lord died on the cross. Rather, it is a subjective peace. It is the tranquility of soul flowing from the cross.

Thus as a fruit of the Spirit²⁰ it is a confident trust in God's flawless wisdom and infinite power that provides calm amid the storms of life. It is the emotion that arises from the conviction that when it comes to eternity, it is well with my soul. And so though the world is shattering all around you, nevertheless all is at rest inside because it is the Lord upon whom you rely!

Now with this, notice the important qualification to this peace.

Surpasses Comprehension

Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, **which passeth all understanding**²¹, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Literally this means “it goes beyond all the mind. This indicates that our minds cannot rationally comprehend nor fully understand this peace. It transcends intellectual powers. It transcends analysis, insights, and understanding. It is superior to human scheming, devices, and solutions.

It is a peace which the human mind cannot figure out. It is a peace that is unpredictable and thrives in the most unthinkable situations. Now it is this “guard”²² that is stationed over our heart and mind!

You say I haven't seen this guard lately in my life? Where is he?

Before we answer these questions, notice that circumstances cannot dissuade this guard. Neither hardships, or trials, or difficulties, pain, suffering, uncertainties of the present, or even a terrible past will keep this guard from standing at his post. He will protect your heart and mind in and through all things!

Feeding the Guard

And yet, as you probably have noticed, he is not always on duty. In fact the text reads this way.

Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds **through Christ Jesus.**”

It is clear from this passage that the presence of this guard in our life is conditional! There is one thing that all guards need — no matter how diligent they may be! All guards need to be fed.

²⁰ Compare Galatians 5:22

²¹ νοῦς nous

²² It is important to note that the peace spoken about here is not only in reference to the individual, but clearly touches upon the community..

- a. As we'll see in verse 9, the title “God of peace” occurs in Paul in contexts where community unrest is lurking.
- b. Likewise, Christ is called, “our peace,” in Ephesians because He has made the Jew and Gentile into one people (e.g. Ephesians 2:14-17; compare also Colossians 3:15; Romans 14:19; Ephesians, 4:3).
- c. Quote: Thus in the words of Alec Motyer: “It would, therefore, be an unnatural constriction of Paul's thinking to understand him as offering, say to Euodias and Syntyche, a peace powerful enough to master anxiety but impotent to mend their broken relationship...” (BST, *Philippians*, page 209)

When was the last time you fed your guard? As the guard stood at attention protection your heart and mind, did you ever offer him a bite to eat? Or did you take him for granted and neglect him?

There is something about being in the military and standing on guard duty that creates an enormous appetite. If you don't feed this guard he will go away.

How do you feed the guard named, "Incomprehensible peace of God?"

According to this text, you have to give him a big portion of "trust" every day-. This is the food that he feeds upon! As you commune with God, you must do as the Apostle Peter exhorts:

1 Peter 4:19, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God **commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.**"

Philippians 4:6, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving **let your requests be made known unto God.**"

Now as you do this, our text tells us that the guard of peace will do its work.

Isaiah 26:3, "**Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.**"

Family of God, you want to know the peace spoken about here?

To know the peace spoken of we must go back to our need to cultivate a life of dependence upon God. This is difficult... Dr. John MacArthur wrote these words

"The real challenge of the Christian life is not to eliminate every unpleasant circumstance; it is to trust in the good purpose of our infinite, holy, sovereign, powerful God in every difficulty."²³

How do we develop a life of dependence? First we must grow in our understanding of three things. The first of these is the character of God. Calvin wrote in his commentary these words:

"Ignorance of the providence of God is the cause of all impatience, and that this is the reason why we are so quickly, and on trivial accounts, thrown into confusion, and often, too, become disheartened because we do not recognize the fact that the Lord cares for us."²⁴

A View of the Almighty

This is such an important truth! Indeed, we must elevate our view of the Almighty!²⁵

Years ago, Dr. R. C. Sproul had a conversation with Dr. John Piper over dinner. At one point in the meal, Dr. Piper opened up and said, "Do you know what my aim is in every sermon?"

²³ Dr. John MacArthur, Commentary on Philippians, page. 284

²⁴ Calvin's Commentaries, Volume XXI, Philippians, page 118

²⁵ Taken from Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 1961, page 12.

With great curiosity, Dr. Sproul said, “No, but tell me!”

Dr. Piper replied, “My goal is to show my congregation how great God is!”

This is what we must be about today! Don't ever settle in your walk with God for a feel-good devotion. In and through all things, endeavor to catch a glimpse of the glory and weightiness of God. We must also keep in view our own sinfulness and wretchedness. In Matthew 5 we read this:

Matthew 5:4, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.”

The one who knows the rich comfort of the Lord — the peace of God — is the one who, having discovered their spiritual poverty without Christ, mourns! The disparity between ourselves and God should cause us to stop defending ourselves and our sin. We must find ourselves running to the cross. This will lead us to the glorious work that Christ did on the cross in reconciling us to God. Paul emphasizes this in Romans 5.

Romans 5:1, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Indeed, when a person comes to understand the glorious forgiveness that he has received from Christ a peace that surpasses all comprehension indeed will guard his heart and mind! When these things exist in our lives, so will the “peace of God.”

A Longing for Christ

Secondly we must allow the difficulties of this life to produce in us a greater longing for the Lord.

Hebrews 12:11, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

When an athlete is preparing for a competition such that he enters the weight room, he knows that the purpose of the lifting is to break his muscle down such that it can be built up again. In this context, the phrase can oft-be heard, “It hurts so good.”

When you are lifting and your muscles become fatigued, they begin to hurt. The “burning” that is felt is a symptom that you are lifting correctly and so will reap the reward. It is the ineffective athlete who doesn't allow the pain to exist, but rather stops when it has just begun. Indeed, the athlete must work with the pain, not against it.

Such must be our approach to the bitter providences of the Lord.

Hebrews 10:35-36, “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.”

And so family of God, let us endure when the trials come. Do not question God! Rather flee to Him! Let your requests be made known unto Him. And the Peace shall guard us as we sojourn in this land!

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 29, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.