

The Lord is at hand

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[0 : 00] The sequel to the Philippians, chapter 4, and the last clause of the rest of the world. The word, the Lord, is at hand.

This is a chapter of exhortation addressed to the church and the people of God at Philippi in the first instance, and to the church of God generally, to the end of the age.

And the apostle wanted his meaning and forcefulness to his exhortation in three words. The Lord is at hand.

And this is it in his head, it says why you are to stand pat in the Lord, why you are to be of the same mind in the Lord, why you are to rejoice in the Lord always, why you are to be temperate and balanced in all things in your life, why you are not to be over-anxious and over-careful, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thankfulness, you are to let your requests be made known unto God.

Then the apostle goes on to show his own contentment with his lot in life and his assurance of God's superintending goodness and care, and his confidence that his God would supply all their needs according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ.

[1 : 46] It is a chapter that speaks so eloquently and powerfully of the overriding mercy and grace of God towards his cause and his people in the world.

And the apostle, we believe, had this attitude of peace and quietness and contentment of mind and spirit because he had a deep and overwhelming awareness of the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord, he says, is at hand. None of us know, of course, when precisely the Lord is going to return again. We know that he is going to return.

We know not the precise hour or day or moment when he will return. This matter is hidden from all human and angelic consciousness.

Only God himself knows the precise hour and moment when world history will be consummated and when the Lord Jesus Christ shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God.

[3 : 01] But we should ever seek to have an awareness, a sense of the imminence of this event. The danger is that even we who believe it give intellectual assent to it tend to put its heart away from it.

We are in danger of containing it to the remote future. We think of the thousands, the thousands of years that are gone when this truth was held and emphasized as it is here in these words, but nothing has happened in the intervening years.

However, the important thing is that we should always seek to have an abiding and acute sense of this event, an awareness of the event that will end world history.

Now, all orthodox interpreters of Scripture agree that there are several great events which must precede the Lord's come.

There is, of course, the calling of the Gentiles, something that has already taken place as to a point. We read in Scripture, and this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come.

[4 : 28] We read it in Matthew chapter 24 a while ago. It must be preached for a testimony to all nations. The Great Commission, it must embrace all nations, not necessarily every individual person.

But the Great Commission must be proclaimed amongst all nations and all people. Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. It doesn't mean, of course, that every single individual will hear or accept or respond to the call of the gospel.

But in a general sense, this event must precede the coming of our Lord, the calling of the Gentiles. It has been fulfilled up to a point, but not holy.

And another event that we believe that must precede our Lord's coming is the conversion of God's ancient covenant people, the Jews.

And this event still awaits fulfillment. We read about it in Romans chapter 11 particularly. This chapter, I think, clearly speaks of a national and a spiritual restoration.

[5 : 43] The first part has already occurred. And indeed, not so very long ago, this event would have seemed quite impossible. But less than 50 years ago, Christians looking forth would deem such an event to be quite outwith the bount of reason.

But now it has happened, the impossible has happened. There is an Israeli nation actually established in the world. The Jews have been brought back to their national homes.

The first part of Scripture have been fulfilled. They have a national restoration. But there is still a spiritual, we believe. This will be fulfilled in the good purpose of God.

And while not all Jews will respond any more than all individuals of other nations, yet by and large, we look to that day when there will be a mighty work of God's Spirit amongst his ancient covenant people.

This must precede the coming of our Lord. And then too, there is another event that will precede our Lord's coming and that is the great apostasy and the great tribulation.

[7 : 06] That event to which our Lord called attention again in the chapter we read in Matthew chapter 24, also in Mark chapter 13 and in Luke chapter 21.

These teachings clearly found a partial fulfillment in the awful days which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

But in 2 Thessalonians and in 1 Timothy and in 2 Timothy, the Apostle Paul clearly represents these events as preceding the coming again of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let no man deceive you by any means, he says, for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.

2 Thessalonians chapter 2 at verse 3. It may well be that we are in the midst of such a day. There is great apostasy as we know throughout the world and there is much tribulation in many places at all events.

[8 : 12] This is an event that will precede our Lord's coming again. And there is of course also another singular event and that is the appearance of the Antichrist.

Now this term is found only in the epistles of John but whether Antichrist will be embodied in a person or in a principle is not altogether clear.

I think we have no scriptural evidence for asserting that this event has taken place. There have been systems, religious and political systems throughout the centuries which could very properly be given this designation of the Antichrist.

But we believe that such will be the nature of the Antichrist that when he does come or it comes then there will be no doubt whatever in the mind of God's believing people the matter will be so very clear to themselves.

And so these events will transpire before the coming again of our Lord and of our Savior. there are different attitudes among people with regard to this event and these attitudes could be classified and a certain groupings.

[9 : 40] We know that there are those who reject outrightly such an event such an occurrence as this. The man who scornfully repudiates and disbelieves that any such event will happen this to him is unscientific and irrational and completely contrary to reason.

It is unscholarly to think in such terms like the Greek philosophers who listen to the Apostle Paul preaching on the doctrine of the resurrection.

some mock and others turn away and so they will not accept under any circumstances that such an event as this will take place.

There are those who reject it completely. And of course there is also the cynical doubter of the person to whom Peter refers in his second epistle chapter 3 at verse 3 knowing this first that there shall come in the last days scoffers walking in their own lusts and saying where is the promise of his coming?

For since the fathers tell us leave all things continue as they were. In other words men have been talking like this always they have been putting these matters before us and preaching this doctrine but nothing has happened things continue as they were and so it is likely that things will continue in this way and so there is the cynical doubter with reference to this event.

[11 : 20] There is also the nominal Christian the person who we could call the nominal Christian the one who tacitly accepts the teaching of scripture with reference to the event of our Lord's second coming who believes that Christ will return at least to give intellectual assent to it who would not dream of denying it or any other teaching of the word of God but yet perhaps his life contradicts what he himself says and accepts he gives acknowledgement he acknowledges that these things are so but yet his life is a total contradiction of this fact of what he himself says he believes but then there is a devout believer and it is with a devout believer that we are particularly concerned at this moment the person who not only heartily believes in this event but is also resting his hope for eternity on the one who will be the focal point in this event it is this alone that will make the event exciting as well as awesome for the

Christian both the awesomeness I think and the exciting nature of this event they are emphasized in Paul's words in 1st Thessalonians chapter 4 the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel and with the count of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first and so my dear believing friend let the words of truth be imprinted as with an iron pen on your soul the Lord is at hand so that you would live your life in the light of this great terminal event of history this great event that speaks to us so eloquently and so forcefully of the consummation of history now then how should this notable event how should it be kept fresh in our mind how should we endeavor to keep it before us so that we have an awareness of it

I think this is the point that we ought to try to understand that we should have an awareness of the nearness the imminence of the Lord's coming in order that our own lives would be more pleasing to us as we live and as we witness in our society and I suggest that in order to have such an awareness such a consciousness we should be reading the signs of the times it is that scriptural use that Christians should be reading the signs of the times the Lord himself indicates in the course of his earthly ministry that we should take cognizance of events in order to alert us to this great terminal events of history the danger has always been of course that in doing this men have proceeded to go beyond their remit so to speak and date the event precisely and all they have succeeded in doing is to bring the gospel into this repute we have no right whatever to try and date the event but we should be seeking to read the times and as we look abroad as we look through in the events that are taking place in the world when we see how much there is of apostasy even in the protesting church how so much is being done to undermine the stability of the family how moral standards have been largely overthrown we see pointers in these directions as to the imminence the nearness

I suggest of the event that is before us in these words the Lord is at hand reading the signs of the times and we should also I suggest be observing the onward march of the years taking cognizance of them in ourselves and in others the consideration of the speedy flight of time and the awesome uncertainty as to the day of hour of hour of dimmish solemnly testify to us that the Lord is at hand be also ready say so Lord for in such an hour as you think not the Son of Man cannot we should daily be engaged in a spot of reckoning with reference to this matter reckoning with ourselves saying in the words of scripture teach us to number our days so that we may apply our heart unto wisdom in order to have a constant awareness of of this great event we should be seeing the onward march of the years we should also be observing the recurring cycle of the season and this should be reminding us of the event of our

Lord's return seeing the constant and endless process of growth development and death around us you know yourselves hardly has a production of the earth blossomed into life and beauty before we can discern in it evidences of decay and of death each season as it passes brings us one step nearer to watch one great culminating event of human history sadly our minds are not always orientated in this way we allow these things to pass before our eyes we'll have a second thought when they are to be diverting our minds and our thoughts to this great event of history and thus giving us an awareness of it constantly and also of course noting more clearly the inexorable message that death has for every one of us among us and about us you see there is no event in life that connects us as creatures so closely with eternity as does the event of death when for instance someone very dear to us and very close to us is cut down and passes over the bar our thoughts naturally follow them we try to picture them in another world we try to visualize them in the context of eternity and so the other world is our awe to be very near to us at such solemn moments and the events that will end human history ought to be brought very prominently before our minds the Lord himself is at hand and so by way of summing up what practical bearing ought such an event thinking or such an event what practical bearing should it have on us as God professing people well for one thing

[19 : 30] I suggest that it should have a solemnizing and sobering effect on it because this will be the culminating event of time after this event time will have ceased time will be no more and you see time speaks to us of our opportunities time speaks to us of our privilege on that day many will we know many will stand before the judge of all the earth having missed their opportunity and having abused their privileges they will be covered with shame and covered with confusion as they are summoned into the presence of a judge of all the earth to receive according as they have done in the body whether it be good or whether it be evil they will have to admit that they are not properly prepared for the heavenly wedding and so they must be prepared to be banished from the presence of the king into outer darkness and so thinking on this great event that will end time ought to have a solemnizing and sobering effect upon our minds and upon our spirits time will come to an end and all the opportunities and privileges that we have in time will also come to a close and then to considering contemplating this event or to have surely a quieting and calming influence upon our spirits and our hearts see how prominently this features in the context the apostle himself was obviously in this frame of mind as he exhorts the

Philippian believers to be careful for nothing but in all things by prayer and supplication to let their requests be made known unto God let your mind dwell on this on the fact that the Lord is near at hand and this will act as a soothing balm on your spirit as you think on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and in great glory for as you do then the peace of God which has of all understanding shall keep your heart and mind through Jesus Christ this is the effect which thinking on this event will have on you it will have effect of quieting and calming your spirit in the light of what you see happening around you as you recall that the Lord is at hand then you will not run to and fro practically looking in this direction and in that direction so it has

I suggest this practical effect upon the believing life and heart of quietening and calming your spirit in the faith yes of the inscrutable providences of God and then surely also it ought to have the effect of exciting and rejoicing our hearts for his return will it will mean the cessation of all the tribulations which are attendant on this checkered field it will mean above all being with Christ and seeing him and serving him without wheeliness forever and ever and this will be far better as the apostle Paul says elsewhere this is something that greatly excited the apostle himself as is obvious from his writings you remember how he spoke in the first chapter of this epistle

I am in a strait to be with Christ which is far better he recognized of course that his time had not yet come his duty was to remain where he was but to go and to be with Christ was something that was infinitely better than remaining here there is something terribly far wrong with the believer if the prospect of being with Christ doesn't excite him and doesn't bring rejoicing to his spirit as he thinks of this great terminal event of time the Lord is at hand and yet another practical effect which I suggest it ought to have on us is that of urging and stimulating us in doing what we are engaged to do with all our might with all our strength with all our mind while we have the opportunity it ought to make a stretch ourselves to the very limit in the work of the

Lord we should always be urged on in the king's business by the fact that our time is so brief our time is so limited the night is closing in upon us and aware soon we shall be where we cannot serve him as we are called upon to serve him yet I'm not for a moment suggesting that the Christian will not serve throughout eternity he will all God's glorified people they will rejoice in serving him forever and ever but the nature of the service will be different that is clear and so we have so little time left have we not to do all the things that have to be done every day is far too short for the work that his kingdom demands offers this duty is frequently urged in scripture to press on toward the mark to gird on our to run with patience the risk that he said before looking unto

[25 : 53] Jesus and looking for that day when he himself will come and when he will call his people to himself come he will and let us my friends seek to have more of the consciousness the awareness of this event upon our own spirit as we seek to do what little we are called upon to do what little we can do in our day and in our society it is with under sense of this culminating event in history this is what will give urgency to our task this is what will stimulate us in performing our work the Lord is at hand and so while we can let us do the work of the Lord and let us rejoice in the prospect of his coming the fact that he will appear and that his appearance will not be long delayed he will come from heaven with a shout with the voice of the ask angel and with the trump of

God those who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with him in the cloud to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord comfort one another with these words stimulate one another encourage one another exhort one another so that by his grace we may be more diligent in doing what we have to do while we have the opportunity and the strength for the day is past passing and our energy is past heaven the Lord is indeed a time let us do the Lord's work while we are in amen may he add his blessings to our meditation in his word shall we unite in prayer oh Lord our God we pray to speak to us by thy Holy Spirit that we would have an awareness every day of the imminence of thy return grant that we may live day by day as under a scrutiny of our

Lord and grant that we may look day by day to thy coming in power and in great glory may this be a stimulant to each one of thy people to work while it is called today for night comes when no man shall work bless to us thy word enable us to meditate upon it to carry it with us and to lay it up in our hearts as we go through this week upon which we have now entered may we be enabled O God to do our duty in thy fear and with us sing the light to thy glory and to thy coming again be with us as we join in singing together our parting for Jesus sake amen