

The Lord is Near!
-Ryan Parsons-

Philippians 4:5 (NASB)

*Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. **The Lord is near.***

One of the loneliest moments in my life was being locked inside a cold room for several hours against my will. There were doors with no handles, cinderblock walls, and an industrial tile floor. The temperature made it too cold to sleep. Fluorescent bulbs, 14 above me, were so bright that even though you closed your eyes, it was too bright. The floor made it too uncomfortable to sit or lay down. I found myself waiting in misery, counting the seconds, unsure of what was next, and wondering if anyone really cared.

I was definitely feeling:

Psalm 10:1

Why, Lord, do you stand far off?

Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

I imagine that is only a fraction of what I would have felt like in the Philippian jail (Acts 16). It was without a doubt discouraging to be stripped, beaten, and placed in chains. If only for a moment, the question must have flashed through Paul and Silas' mind. Where is God?

However, Paul and Silas seemed to be aware of a unique dynamic, something different that preserved their perspective. Luke tells us in Acts 16:26:

and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken.

And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

Out of the blue, an earthquake shakes the prison, opens the doors, and turns the prisoners loose. How do you explain that? Ironically, Paul and Silas aren't found paralyzed in the duck-and-cover position. They aren't speechless, but rather calm, collected and encouraging. Despite all the bad things going on around them, they seemed sure that...the Lord was near!

Surprisingly, that heartbroken psalmist we mentioned knew it too.

Psalm 10:16-18

16 The Lord is King for ever and ever;

the nations will perish from his land.

17 You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted;

you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,

18 defending the fatherless and the oppressed,

so that mere earthly mortals

will never again strike terror.

He saw that the Lord was close enough to hear, encourage, listen and defend. The Lord was near!

The Philippian Christians Paul was encouraging had found themselves in a similar situation. Their world was hostile to their faith, and it was effecting them internally. They were feeling alone, afraid, and helpless. But, Paul understands. After all, he knows the community and has experience with their abuse. With that in mind, one thing, that he doesn't want to leave out of his letter is to remind them the Lord is near. Why? When they begin to see that He is close enough to hear, encourage, listen, and defend...it will infuse them with hope, perseverance, and thankfulness.

Guess what? The Lord is still near! (Psalm 145:18-20)