

Draw near to God - Sunday 27th September, 2015

“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” James 4:7-8

Beloved in The Lord,

Today’s text is a wonderful promise - ***“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”***

We have a beautiful old Hymn that expresses the desire of man: “Nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee.” Not only do we possess an innate desire to draw near to God, He desires to draw near to us. He wants us to be close to Him. He loves us. He created us in order that we may enjoy an intimate and personal fellowship with Him.

God is not really interested in religious activity, He wants our heart. He wants us to be close to Him. You can be very religious and yet not have a personal relationship with God through Jesus. We see God’s heart expressed in Jesus words when He was approaching Jerusalem, God’s chosen city, for the last time:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.” (Mt.23:37)

These words are full of love. Jesus heart is breaking . He loves all people and does not desire for anyone to be lost. He wants all of us close to His heart. The sad words are *“and you were unwilling”*. What can be sadder than that? Nothing could be worse than hearing God say to us: “I had so much to give you, but you rejected me. You were unwilling to come to me.”

That is why over and over again we are invited to draw near to God, to submit to Him, to obey Him. He is a good God. He is love. He is grace and mercy. All His ways are Righteousness and truth. In His Hands are salvation and eternal life. When we are with Him our cup of blessing overflows continually. Goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our life.

Listen again to our text:

“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” James 4:7-8

The first step is to submit to God. This means to trust Him in faith. It is an active, willing submission. It is placing yourself in His hands. It means to surrender every moment and every aspect of your life to Him. Occasional submission to God’s will does not cut it, it must be continual. Paul puts it like this:

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you

***may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”
(Romans 12:1-2)***

Paul is urging us to submit to God because He is merciful. We are to offer ourselves to Him as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to Him. I would like to pause briefly and have a closer look at this phrase: “*by the mercies of God*”. God is a God of mercy and grace. He shows mercy to every sinner who truly repents. When we truly humble ourselves and confess our sin and repent we always receive mercy. God extends His love and grace to us with no exceptions. He doesn’t scold us, He forgives us.

So great is His mercy, that even the greatest sinner who truly repents receives an instant and eternal pardon.

We see this illustrated in the prodigal son. This boy, who boldly approached his father and asked for his inheritance, received a great deal of money from his Father. Pockets well lined, he took off into the big smoke. He lived it up spending his money on wine, women and song. Eventually the money ran out and a severe drought hit the land. He couldn’t find any suitable employment as times were hard, and eventually ended up feeding and tending swine. His thoughts began to turn toward his father and his home. How could he face his father? He devised a plan to ask his father to receive him as a servant. He realised that he was not worthy to be a son anymore.

The father looked out one day down the dusty road and his heart began to beat for joy. There in the distance, head hanging low, feet dragging along, dressed in rags was his son. The one who had some time earlier left home, proud, chest out, full of confidence was now a sorry sight indeed. Here he comes covered in swine dung, dirty, famished, humbled.

The father cannot contain himself and runs out to meet him. He hugs him and orders the servants to bring clothes and sandals and to put a ring on his sons finger. He ordered a feast to celebrate the return of his son. This is a picture of our Heavenly Father. He and all of Heaven rejoices when a sinner turns to Him. The angels hold a party. God is mercy and love.

Draw near to Him and He will draw near to you. As we see from Jesus telling of this story, He literally runs towards us. He loves us. Please understand this truth.

The next thing I would like to emphasise is that we are to present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. God wants us. He wants us more than a donation, or a ritualistic gesture of service. He wants you, your heart, your life, your love. Give all to Him and then see what blessing comes your way.

As I have said before all of Gods ways are good. There is no better life than life that is submitted to Him, lived in His presence daily.

How then in practical terms do we draw near to God?

There are three main ways I will set before you today. There are others but these are the main ones: Praying, reading and worshipping.

Firstly prayer. When we pray we draw near to God. It is important that we pray in Jesus name. To pray in Jesus name is to understand that it is only through Jesus shed blood that we can have access to the Father. When we draw near to God, praying in Jesus name, then God hears our prayers.

It is important to pray all the time and for all things. In any relationship it is important to maintain communications. If a husband and wife do not speak to each other for extended periods of time, they begin to drift apart.

Prayer is much more than asking or petitioning God. Prayer is a conversation. You have a Father who loves you and who wants to hear from you. He wants to hear about everything that is on your heart. That which brings you joy, that which brings you sorrow. That which you do not understand. Talk to Him about all things. Draw near to God, speak to Him and you will find that He draws near to you.

David writes in Psalm 139:

“When I awake, I am still with You” Ps.139:18b

When you wake up in the morning, your first thoughts should be toward God. Your first conversation should be with Him. Thank Him for the night, for the new day. For the gift of life. For a new opportunity to love Him and serve Him. If you draw near to God as you start the day, you will find that His presence empowers you throughout the day. Stay in touch with Him all throughout the day and as you go to sleep talk to Him some more. Thank Him for the day. Thank Him that while you sleep He will be awake watching over you. Confess any sins and mistakes you may have accrued during the day. Thank Him for what has been good and give Him the glory and then sleep sweetly.

Paul writes: ***“pray without ceasing;”*** (1.Thes.5:17)

The next thing is read. Read your Bible. God speaks through His Word. The main way we discover God’s will, His plans and His ways is by reading the Bible. God speaks powerfully through His Word. His Word is living. It is His Word – The Word of God. Read it, read it, read it!

The more you read, the closer you will find yourself to God. The Word of God works in your life, it penetrates deep and it cleanses, and renews and strengthens you. It is your food. I repeat: Read it, read it, read it! This is the most important thing you can do on any given day. You eat most days and usually more than once a day. As your body needs fuel, so does your spirit and soul. Taste and see that the Lord is good. His Word is perfect and it is truth. Read it daily, and often.

The third thing is worship. God’s Word tells us that God inhabits the praises of His people. We can worship in many different ways, but worship we must. We need to thank and praise Him for all things. We need to sing a new song of praise often. Sing to Him, praise Him, worship Him.

***We read in Psalm 100:
“A Psalm for Thanksgiving.
Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth.
Serve the Lord with gladness;
Come before Him with joyful singing.
Know that the Lord Himself is God;
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
Enter His gates with thanksgiving
And His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him, bless His name.
For the Lord is good;
His lovingkindness is everlasting
And His faithfulness to all generations.***

Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. If we want to draw near to God, that is how we are to come. Through His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. We are given a clear reason for doing so -“For the Lord is good.”

He is good. He is love.

May we draw near to Him everyday knowing that if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us.

Amen

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.