

Drawing Near to God

2/8/2024

In the last two weeks lessons the subject of 'How to become a Christian was our focus. Today our focus will be on passages from Scripture in which God calls mankind to draw closer to Him. Scripture tells us many times and in various ways that God our creator wants a closer relationship with us, the human beings He created. We begin with a passage from James the half brother of Jesus.

"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." (James 4:8)

The above passage is contained within a section of Scripture where James is rebuking individuals for their improper conduct before God. Just a few verses earlier James says the following -

"Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?"

Recalling for a moment the sequence of events spoken of in Acts 2 when those to whom Peter was addressing realized that they had killed the Messiah they asked *'what shall we do'*. To which they were told - *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."*

Each of us have a human body and a spirit within us. Both given to us by God. The gift of the Holy Spirit given to us after repenting and being Baptized we are told can also dwell within us to the point we become filled with it. Don't ask me to fully explain this or how it is even possible. But I think the following statement may help point us in the right direction.

I recently heard a preacher repeat a comment I had heard long ago made by H. C. Leupold.

'We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.'

I think this agrees well with what Solomon spoke of in Ecclesiastes chapter 12 which says -

"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"— before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades;

*when people rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets. Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well, **and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.***”

And the words spoken by Jesus to the woman at the well - *“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”* (John 4:24)

Back to the passage in James. Here James describes a number of things we can do to draw nearer to God -

1. Cleanse our hands -

This is an expression which would have been well recognized by the Jews of James' day. Cleansing rituals abounded in Temple Worship. Today having clean hands carries with it more the idea of one's innocence in a matter. Somewhat like Pilate who physically washed his own hands with water to signify his innocence in condemning Jesus to the cross. (Matthew 27:24)

2. Purifying of one's heart.

3. Recognize that we are being doubled minded when we remain in sin while trying to be Christ like.

The next passage for consideration comes from Isaiah -

The prophet Isaiah in the opening chapter of his book describes Israel's condition having been rebellious towards God. Then in verse 18 of this opening chapter he describes this offer from God to them -

*“Come now, **let us reason together**, says the Lord:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool. (Isaiah 1:18)*

The Hebrew word used here in Isaiah 1:18 for the phrase **'let us reason together'** is *yâkach* pronounced yaw-kakh'. It is an offer from God for Israel to respond to God. This word *yakach* often carries with it the idea of one being reprov'd, rebuked, chastened, or to defend, dispute or correct. You may recognize some of those things from this familiar passage in The New Testament - *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17 (KJV))

The next two verses in Isaiah chapter one inform Israel how this will turn out for them should they choose to follow or not follow this direction and offer from God - *“If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”* (Isaiah 1:19-20)

Here we see in this opening chapter of Isaiah that despite how far Israel had wandered away from God, God was still willing to take them back.

Next we see the prophet Jeremiah providing Israel with a offer and promise from God -
"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."
(Jeremiah 29:13-14 NIV)

In this passage from the prophet Jeremiah, written over a hundred years after the offer from God spoken of in Isaiah chapter one, we see God making another offer to Israel to gather them from all the nations that He God would scatter them for them having refused God's offer once again.

And are reminded of this about God's Mercy in Proverbs -
"I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me." (Proverbs 8:17 NIV)

Here in this passage from Proverbs we have the simple truth concerning God. This was echoed by Jesus as recorded by His disciples. *"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."* (Matthew 7:7-8)

And the Psalmist repeats God's offer -
"The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." (Psalm 145:18 ESV)

Here we learn a few things from the Psalmist -
1. The Lord is near to all who call on Him
2. That is to all who call on God in truth
3. God is near waiting to hear from those whom He has created

God's offer was there at the beginning of the nation of Israel as well -
"But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul." (Deuteronomy 4:29 KJV)

Here in this passage above from Deuteronomy we see Moses addressing the people of Israel who are on a journey through the desert, headed towards the promised land. Moses informing them that they can find God if they seek Him with all their heart and soul. Again this is a message often repeated in Scripture to those who would seek the only true and living God.

Same message found in the New Covenant -
"And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (Hebrews 11:6 ESV)

In the passage above we see the Hebrew writer echoing the words of Deuteronomy. Notice the subjects of drawing near to God, pleasing God, believing in God, faith and rewards are all topics spoken of here.

*"Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my **soul**."* (Psalm 143:8 ESV)

Paul ties together the ideas spoken above by the Psalmist and Hebrew writers when he writes this in his letter to those in Roman "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17). In this section of his letter Paul speaks of those in Israel who like those of his nation over the centuries had heard this Word (message), and yet many had failed to pay proper attention to it.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30 NIV)

As Christians we may recognize these words from the gospel of Matthew, but this was a promise made to Moses and Israel long ago by God as recorded in Exodus 33:14 where it says - *"And He said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."* The scene in Exodus chapter 33 is of God calling upon Moses to lead God's people through the desert. Moses wants to know and see who it is that calls him to do so. Moses is seeking assurance that God will go with them and guide them on this perilous journey.

"O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land without water."
(Psalm 63:1 NIV)

Here the Psalmist echoes the idea of being in a dry and weary land in which he seeks God. Stating that the Psalmist very **soul** thirsts for God and his **flesh** yearns for God.

"Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice! Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his **presence** continually!"
(I Chronicles 16:10-11 ESV)

Here the writer of Chronicles calls for rejoicing among those who seek the Lord. And calling for the seeking of God's presence continually.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."
(Psalm 139: 23-24)

Having found the Lord the Psalmist here calls on God to search him and his heart. For God to try him, and to know the Psalmist's thoughts. And to lead him in the way everlasting.

Paul says it this way in his letter to the Philippians - *"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."*

"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned." (John 15:4-5 NIV)

Here John the disciple of Jesus recounts our Lord's words. Notice how near Our Lord is in this passage. **He is in us** and calls for us to remain in Him. We are the body of Christ, remain there!

“He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:25)

God makes it possible to do what John spoke of just a moment ago - That is to remain in Him. Because He is able to save forever - save who? - those who draw near to God. How? - through Him (Jesus the Messiah) who always lives to make intercession for them.

This morning we have just briefly covered a few of the many passages which speak of God's desire to be near those of His creation. But our sin separates us from Him and yet God has set forth a way to overcome this obstacle. God calls us to come to Him through Christ Jesus His only begotten Son.

How do we do that? See last week's lesson. Or better yet open God's Word and read His offer to mankind. Here is a hint 'For God so loved the world that...