



James 4:8a The Outworking of Humility Pt3: Drawing Near to God

December 6, 2015

Text: James 4:8a

KJV: Jas 4:8 *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.*

Thoughts:

- As we've been saying for the last two weeks, the key principle so far in James 4 is to defeat pride, and the key imperative is to **humble** ourselves as Christ humbled Himself.
- Beginning in verse six, James puts forward the key to overcoming the sins he has listed and rebuked: submitting to God in humility because **God opposes the proud**.
- James outlines at least five things we can do to see the increased Outworking of Humility in our lives in verses 7-10:
 1. Submit to God (4:7)
 2. Resist the devil (4:7)
 3. Draw near to God (4:8)
 4. Cleanse our hands and purify our hearts (4:8)
 5. Mourn and weep over our sins (4:9)
- The Holy Spirit restates the purpose for these instructions in 4:10: "Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you." What we should desire then is a greater modesty and meekness before God.

James' Language in our Text

1. I believe this language is rooted in instances of Old Testament ecclesiology and worship. The two instances that come to mind, and in a way, frame future Old Testament worship, are found in the time of Moses:

Ex 3:1–6 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

- God in His mercy, is about to send Moses to deliver the people of Israel.
 - But before He does, He calls Moses to Himself, introduces Himself, and does so within the context of His own holiness (Exo 3:5)
 - Two important lessons here for our purposes today: Moses can “draw near” 1) only because God **called** Him and 2) only in the manner God **prescribed**.
2. The second instance is found in Exodus 19.
- In Exodus 19, God is preparing His people to make a covenant with Him. A covenant is a spiritual agreement between God and man.
 - God is about to give His Law and promise them His blessing if they would obey it. He therefore calls them to “draw near.”
 - I believe James is using this verbiage on purpose in order to remind the hearer of the awesome privilege to be in the presence of the Almighty, but also that God is not to be taken lightly.

From Exodus 19, we learn:

- God desires a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” This suggests a very close walk with Him.
 - God wanted more than a relationship with Moses; He spoke to all the people.
 - The people could not approach God “the way they were.” They had to **adjust** to Him! They had to wash, to maintain a level of purity, etc. This was to show that a holy God had called to them, and they were to respond, as best they could, in kind.
3. The Old Testament point is this: God is **holy**. *To approach Him requires thought, preparation, and love-based fear.* This is seen even more clearly when the Tent of Meeting and Temple were built and worship established in those places.

Note: As Christians, we know our closeness to Him comes only through Christ. But is it unreasonable to think that God still deserves our attention, heart-preparation, and volition?

4. Again, how could mostly Jewish believers not be reminded of the circumstances of the giving of the Ten Commandments in James 4:8?
5. In context, drawing near is to “draw near” and to “submit to God.” It is to humble oneself. It is to do away with quarrels and fights and selfish prayers and adulteries.
6. **May we NEVER lose our fear of the God we love. May we NEVER forget the holy nature of the sacrifice of Christ. May we NEVER treat His sacrifice as a common thing, but rather present reverence to Him and adore Him!**

James' language also finds references in the New Testament

1. Consider the prayer life of Jesus':

Mat 14:23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.

Mar 1:35 And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Luk 6:12 In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.

2. Put simply, our Lord regularly “drew near.” He took the time to talk to His Father in prayer.
3. Of course from the perspective of Christ's cross, for us drawing near is less **spacial** and more **relational**. God is omnipresent. There are no longer special places we have to go to commune with Him because of the blood of Christ!

Heb 7:18–19 For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

Heb 10:19–25 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

4. Let us remember the call to pray! Let us be reminded of the honor of approaching Him in supplication! Let us draw near!

Luk 18:1 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Php 4:6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

1Ti 2:8 I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

Col 4:2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Heb 4:14–16 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

5. Let us remember that prayer is about:

- Talking with God and allowing Him to talk to us
- Aligning our will with His. God is unchangeable; prayer changes us! :)
- Making our petitions and requests known to God in faith
- Moments of adoration and praise as well as brokenness and passionate repentance
- Fighting principalities and powers; pulling down strongholds; praying against the traps and snares of Satan.

Drawing Near to God

Based on both the Old and New Testaments, I believe it is safe to conclude that "drawing near" consists of at least two things:

Consecration (intentional, day to day purity)

Communication (insistent and passionate prayer)

I also believe the context of James 4, including the very next verse (which in my opinion is a command to do both pray and pursue purity), bears this out.

Questions to Encourage Drawing Near:

1. Although our actions cannot save us, we know that practical holiness pleases God. We've been commanded to be holy in all our conduct because He is holy. (1 Pet 1:15-16) How often do you consider living a consecrated life?
2. How does this thought play out for you day to day? Is there a desire (and the matching effort) to walk in righteousness?
3. Like a wife who strives to please her husband (even though that striving is not the basis of his love), do you strive to please the Lord? There is no sense in pretending we can be intimate with Christ without such a heart.
4. How is your prayer life? Do you desire to communicate and commune with the Creator of the Universe daily?
5. As you consider the Gospel of Jesus...His perfect life, undeserved condemnation, suffering, and shed blood for our sins, are you pulled to your knees with a heartfelt desire to worship Him, adore Him, please Him and make Him known?

6. If prayer has become a bit dull for you, what are you willing to do to recapture your passion for “drawing near?” Remember, James is issuing practical commands. Salvation is assumed. Do you WANT to be in His presence?
7. Are you willing to rise early, rearrange your day, and otherwise suffer in the flesh to sit with Him, read His Word, and worship Him?

May we never resemble the people about whom God speaks in Isaiah:

Isa 29:13 And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men..."

And may we consider the cry of the Lord to Zechariah, which sounds a great deal like James' cry to the church in our text:

Zec 1:1–4 In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying, ² "The LORD was very angry with your fathers. ³ Therefore say to them, Thus declares the LORD of hosts: Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. ⁴ Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.' But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the LORD.

In Jesus' name, Amen.