James 4:1-10

The Traits of a Righteous Man’s Prayer Part 2

 Good morning. Today we will be concluding the sermon we started last week which is addressing the traits of a righteous man’s prayer. The Epistle of James has been focusing on how the deeds of a believer in Christ shows evidence that the faith that person possesses is legit. When we approach God in prayer, the attitude we take in that prayer is very important because when we approach Him with the wrong kinds of motives we will find that God will not hear our prayer nor answer it. Today we will quickly review the first two traits that we discussed last week and then we will look at the last five traits together. Please open your Bibles to James chapter 4 as we read verses 1-10 again to set the context for today’s message.

 The first trait of a righteous prayer is to approach God with humility. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble because approaching God this way allows Him to be the One who is in control of the situation. We must accept the fact that we cannot change God’s will with our prayers, but through our faith and persistence in prayer we can show Him that we are earnestly seeking for His will to be done in every situation.

 Trait number two is to submit to God meaning that we must acknowledge that God has the authority to answer our prayers using His power. Submission also means to allow God to be the final authority on all matters in life. When we allow God to be the one who guides our lives and directs our paths this reduces the anxiety we will have in life. When we believe the claim that we oversee our lives this causes us to be worried and anxious for the future because the future is not known by anyone except the Lord. We need to let go and allow God to guide our lives while we trust Him to do what is best for us.

 Verse 8 provides us with the third trait of a righteous prayer. We must draw near to God and then He will draw near to us. What does it mean to draw near to God? We can draw near to God in worship, praise, prayer, asking Him for counsel, and living in constant communion with Him in all we do. When we do all these things we are getting closer to God so that we can have a relationship with Him. The only reason that we can approach God is because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. When Jesus died on the cross and paid the ransom due for our sin He opened the door allowing all those who trust in Him to come close to God. Someone who has their trust in Christ can approach God with confidence through His blood knowing that their sins have been paid in full. **“Therefore, let’s approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for help at the time of our need” (Hebrews 4:16).**

 The fourth trait of a righteous prayer is for the person who is approaching God to cleanse their hands and purify their hearts. This idea of purification is not a new concept for James. All through the pages of the Old Testament books of the law the importance of being pure before approaching God was very important. The reason that purification was such an important aspect of worship is because God is a perfect holy being who cannot be in the presence of things that are unclean or unholy. In the book of Exodus, the priests had to cleanse their hands and feet before they entered the tabernacle. In Exodus 30:21 God gave them these instructions “So they shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they do not die; and it shall be a permanent statute for them, for Aaron and his descendants throughout their generations.” Entering the tabernacle and being in the presence of Gid without cleansing led to death. Therefore, James is using an expression that the people reading his letter could identify with. Before approaching God in prayer those who are about to commune with Him need to cleanse themselves and approach God with clean hands. Another way of explaining this would be to use an expression that is used in court by attorneys when they are referring to the other party coming to court trying to deceive the judge. When this happens the attorney says that the other party is coming to court with “dirty hands” because they are attempting to use documentation that is false or misleading. So, when someone is coming to God in prayer, they need to come with clean hands meaning that there should be no goal of trying to mislead God or pray for anything that would be outside of His will. Purifying the heart is like the cleansing of the hands in that the attitude one has before approaching God has much to do the sincerity of the prayer they are going to lift to God. What James means when he tells his readers to purify their hearts is that they need to be continually renewing their minds. The Apostle Paul mentions this when he writes in his epistle to the Romans that they need to sacrifice themselves wholly to God. "**Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as 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" (Roman 12:1-2).**

 The fifth trait of a righteous prayer is to "be miserable, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into gloom." This verse is discussing the concept of repentance. When Jesus began His earthly ministry He told the people to repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Now what does it mean to repent? The Biblical teaching of repentance has two primary parts. The first aspect of repentance is that the person approaching is sorrowful for their sin and regrets that they have sinned against God in that manner. It is important for someone to be sorry when they have sinned against God. But that is not where repentance ends. The second part of being repentant is to turn from that sin and never do it again. When a student gets in trouble in the classroom for misbehaving normally they do say that they are sorry for what they have done. However, when they do that again it makes the apology they have given before losing some of its luster. This is the same way that God looks at His children when they sin against Him. Being sorry is nice, but turning from that sin and living in a new way shows God that the person is sorrowful and desires to live in a new manner.

 In Scripture there is a marvelous example of how repentance looks when it is taught by Jesus. At this time would you please turn with me to the gospel of John chapter 8. Please read with me verses 3-11 "Now the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in the act of adultery, and after placing her in the center of the courtyard, they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?” Now they were saying this to test Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. When they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” And again, He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Now when they heard this, they began leaving, one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman where she was, in the center of the courtyard. And straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on do not sin any longer.” There are three main points from this passage that show us what God desires of His people when they have been convicted of sin. The first thing Jesus does is He calls out all the men making them acknowledge that all of them are sinners. This truth is something we all need to remember. We all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. The second thing we see Jesus do is forgive her of the sin by saying that He didn’t condemn her for what she had done. This grace is the reason why you and I can stand before God at all. God chooses to forgive His children through the blood of His son. The third part of the account shows us that Jesus not only forgave her, but then commands her to sin no more. He told her that she was to take the grace God had offered her and change her way of life. This is what James is talking about when he mentions that we need have sorrow and allow our joy to be turned to gloom. We must be willing to change our ways and return to living in a way that honors God.

 In verse 10 we see James return to the first trait of a righteous prayer by mentioning humility. Those who are humble will be exalted by God. Jesus was the humblest man to ever live because He did not allow His position with God to make Him be treated any better than anyone else. Our God always models the behavior that He expects from His people. Therefore, let us approach God with humility knowing that it is the humble that He will exalt. As we conclude today let us review the five traits of a righteous prayer:

1. Approach God with humility. ​

2. Submit to God- resist the devil and he will flee from you. ​

3. Come close to God and He will come close to you. ​

4. Cleans your hands and purify your hearts. ​

5. Repent over your sin and be sorrowful over it.

If we remember to follow these traits in our prayer life we will find that God will bless us when we come before Him. We must remember that we are seeking for His will to be done in each of these situations, not our own. Now please join me in prayer as we prepare our hearts for the Lord's Supper.

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