



Session 9, Letters From Others

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116. HEBREWS 4: DRAW NEAR TO GOD (Part 1)

The last section—Hebrews 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. 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. 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.

What an invitation to prayer! **We have a great High Priest** Who has absolutely no sin like us, yet Who is uniquely able to sympathize with us, with all our struggles. So **we come before God** in closeness and confidence. Think about what **we receive from God**. We receive His mercy, His grace and His help in everything we need.

117. HEBREWS 10-11: DRAW NEAR TO GOD (Part 2)

Therefore draw near with confidence into the most holy place (Hebrews 10:19). **We draw near to God in faith**. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, “Prayer, in many ways, is the supreme expression of our faith in God.” We come before God with sincere desire (Hebrews 3:7-12), confident assurance, cleansed hearts and purified bodies. We hold fast to God in hope(10:35-39). We may not be able to see Him (Hebrews 1:1), yet we know our reward is found in Him. Hebrews 11:6, “*Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*” Draw near to God, brothers and sisters. God, draw us near to You, we pray.

118. JAMES 1: PRAYER AMIDST TRIALS (Part 1)

James 1:3: “*Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds, for you know the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*” **Prayer amidst trial teaches us to grow in God’s likeness. It teaches us to trust in God’s wisdom.** That’s where we see God’s promise of wisdom. **Prayer amidst trial teaches us to rely on God’s resources. Prayer amidst trial teaches us to live for God’s reward.**

“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12).

119. JAMES 5: PRAYER AMIDST TRIALS (Part 2)

James 5:13-16:

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Then James talks about Elijah as an example. **James exhorts us to pray when we’re hurting, pray when we’re happy.**

We are to pray with the elders. Is the oil they use medicinal? Is it sacramental with special power? The answer is the oil is symbolic. It’s common in Scripture to see anointing as symbolizing the setting apart of someone or something for a particular purpose. There are a variety of different interpretations that are possible here, but the picture is that the power of healing is not found in any oil, but in the God Who answers prayer. The oil symbolizes the picture of setting someone apart as the elders pray for them for special attention and care from God.

James teaches us to **pray with the church** and to **confess our sins to each other**. We know that sin directly causes some sickness, according to 1 Corinthians 11:30, and sin indirectly causes all sickness. We have sickness in the world because sin exists in the world.

So we are to confess our sins to each other, and **we are to intercede on behalf of each other**. Don’t underestimate the effect of prayer in your life and in the lives of others. A.W. Pink said, “The measure of our love for others can largely be determined by the frequency and earnestness of our prayers for them.” Who do you love based on that statement?

And in all this, **pray ultimately for the glory of God**, with trust in God. Listen to this quote from James Montgomery Boice, who was the long-time pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. After he was diagnosed with liver cancer, I think it’s helpful to read what he said to his congregation.

Should you pray for a miracle? Well, you’re free to do that, of course. My general impression is that the God Who is able to do miracles—and He certainly can—is also able to keep you from getting the problem in the first place. So although miracles do happen, they’re rare by definition. A miracle has to be an unusual thing. Above all, I would say pray for the glory of God. If you think of God glorifying Himself in history and you say, where in all of history has God most glorified Himself? He did it at the cross of Jesus Christ, and it wasn’t by delivering Jesus from the cross, though He could have.

Jesus said, 'Don't you think I could call down from My Father ten legions of angels for My defense?' But He didn't do that. And yet that's where God is most glorified. God is in charge. When things like this come into our lives, they are not accidental. It's not as if God somehow forgot what was going on, and something bad slipped by. God is not only the One Who is in charge; God is also good. Everything He does is good. If God does something in your life, would you change it? If you'd change it, you'd make it worse. It wouldn't be as good.

James Boice died eight weeks after sharing that with his congregation. We can trust in the goodness of God through prayer amidst trials.

120. 1 PETER 3: PRAYER AND MARRIAGE

In 1 Peter 3:7 God basically says to husbands, “**Honor your wife**, and God will hear your prayers. Dishonor your wife, and that will hinder your prayers.” Plain and simple. Period.

121. 1 PETER 5: PRAYER AND ANXIETY

Then 1 Peter 5:6-7: “*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that in the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*” **Pray with humility**, knowing that God is sovereign over you, believing and trusting that God is gracious to you. Pray with humility and **pray with honesty**. God bears your burdens as you lift them to Him and God heals your hurts.

God, we praise You for the privilege of casting all our anxieties on You, knowing that You care for us.

122. 1 JOHN 5: PRAYING WITH CONFIDENCE

In similar language to what we saw in the Gospel of John, John writes, “*And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him*” (1 John 5:14-15). So again, **we ask according to God's will**, and as we do, **God hears all of our words**, and **we receive all we need** to walk in His will and experience eternal life.

123. REVELATION 6: PRAYER IN HEAVEN

Speaking of eternal life, this leads us into Revelation and the powerful pictures of prayer we see there—the culmination and climax of the pursuit of God.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud

voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been (Revelation 6:9–11).

Get the picture here. **Believers**—and specifically martyrs here—**who have died are worshipping** (Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 19:1-5). What are they doing? They're worshipping and they're watching. **Believers who have died are watching**, like a great cloud of witnesses according to Hebrews 12:1 and Revelation 18:20.

And **believers who have died are waiting**. The picture here is powerful. They are clearly conscious, audibly loud and emotionally passionate. They are distinctly individual yet completely unified. They are constantly interceding, thirsty for final justice and long for full redemption. They know God's character more deeply than they ever did and love God's church more fully. Finally, they are trusting in God's promises in the present while they are anticipating God's plan for the future. They know what's coming, according to Revelation 7:9-10, which speaks of a great multitude of people from all tribes and peoples and languages worshipping God for salvation.

So God, we praise You that those who have gone before us in faith, although they are absent from the body, they are present with You. Heather's mom and my dad and all the people we love who have trusted in Christ are worshipping and watching and waiting and praying. God, we join with the heavenly assembly right now in prayer to You, in the anticipation of our reunion with them, our brothers and sisters, and particularly our brothers and sisters who have lost their lives in Your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

124. REVELATION 8: PRAYER AND THE END OF THE WORLD

Then this is what we pray for. Look at Revelation 8:1-5:

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

Follow this. Revelation 8 just told us that the prayers of the saints are being stored in the heavenly places. They're all accumulating as incense at the altar of God. Every single prayer for the Kingdom of God to come, every single prayer for the glory of God to be made known—not one of them

is lost in transmission. Not one of them is ever uttered in vain. Every single one of them is fueling the fire of incense that one day soon will usher in the climax of all history in the consummation of God's kingdom. Here's the picture. **Our cries go up.** "*Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name*" (Matthew 6:9). Our cries go up and **His Kingdom comes down.** In John Piper's words:

What are the real master-powers behind the world and what are the deeper secrets of our destiny? Here is the astonishing answer: the prayers of the saints and the fire of God. That means that more potent, more powerful than all the dark and mighty powers let loose in this world, more powerful than anything else, is the power of prayer set ablaze by the fire of God and cast upon the earth.

125. REVELATION 21-22: THE CULMINATION OF ALL OUR PRAYERS

That leads to our last text, Revelation 21-22. I'm going to try to summarize everything we've seen from the beginning of the Bible to where the end brings it all together.

Our Purpose

We have been created for a relationship with God. We saw in Genesis 1:26-28 that we were created in God's image. We saw in Psalm 63:1-8 that we were created to seek God, that our souls thirst for God. "*Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!*" (1 Chronicles 16:11). "*Seek my face.*" (Psalm 27:8).

You and I have been created to seek God and to know God. "*Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me*" (Jeremiah 9:23-24). "*This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*" (John 17:3).

We've also been created to enjoy God. "*You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*" (Psalm 16:11, as well as Psalm 42:1-2).

We've been created to worship God. "*Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will sing praises to my God while I have my being*" (Psalm 146:1-2; plus 147:1).

We've been created to revere God. "*Let all the earth fear the Lord*" (Psalm 33:8, plus Ecclesiastes 12:13).

We've been created to glorify God (Isaiah 43:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:31).

And you and I have been created to love God with all our heart, soul, might, strength—everything we have (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Matthew 22:37; Revelation 21:1-4). So it makes sense then, doesn't it, that the culmination of the Bible is God—the One we've been created to know, enjoy, worship

and love. God is reuniting Himself perfectly to all who have sought and loved and trusted in Him. That's what Revelation 21 is all about.

Our Problem

But here's our problem that we've seen ever since Genesis 3:22-24. **We have been separated from God by our sin.** The effects are everywhere in us and around us. All of us who have trusted in Jesus as Savior from sin and made Him Lord of our lives find ourselves waiting and longing. In the words of Romans 8:22-23, we're waiting for glorification, longing to be restored fully and ultimately in the presence of God, free from sin and suffering.

Our Habits

What are our habits that mark our lives now? **We pray the Word continually.** We "*pray without ceasing...*" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). We **PRAY**:

- **Praise**—worship God for Who He is.
- **Repent**—confess our sin to God and acknowledge our need for Jesus.
- **Ask**—intercede for specific needs in your life and others' lives.
- **Yield**—surrender our lives to following Jesus wherever and however He leads us (Proverbs 3:5-6).

We converse with God continually, and **we fast from food regularly.** We do not "*live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God*" (Matthew 4:4). So we **FAST**:

- **Focus** on God, setting aside a time when we...
- **Abstain** from food.
- **Substitute** the time we would normally eat with prayer and study, then as we do, we...
- **Taste** and see that God is good, that He's better than the basic daily necessity of food (Psalm 34:8).

We pray God's Word continually, we fast from food regularly, and **we pursue God wholeheartedly.** "*One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord*" (Psalm 27:4). "*You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13).

Our Hope

So as we pray, fast and pursue God, our hope is clear in Revelation 21. One day we will be with God.

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:3-4)

We will be with God (Psalm 16:11), as priests in the temple (1 Kings 6:19-20; Revelation 21:15-22) and like a bride with a husband (Revelation 21:2). We read in Revelation 19:6-8 about a wedding: *“For the marriage of the Lamb has come...”* We will be as children of a Father. Jesus said, *“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”* (Luke 12:32).

We will be heirs of a King (Psalm 8:1-9, 24:1; Isaiah 57:13; Revelation 5:9-10, 11:15-18). *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* Matthew 25:34). We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:16-17). We will be a kingdom of priests (Revelation 5:9-10). Listen to the language of Revelation 22:5: *“The Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”* We will reign as heirs of a King in His Kingdom, and we will be participants in a banquet (Luke 22:28-30). *“And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb’”* (Revelation 19:9).

This is our hope: one day, we will be with God and **we will behold God** (John 14:9). Remember Exodus 33:11? *“The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”* Psalm 27:4, *“One thing have I asked of the Lord...to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.”* Job’s hope in 19:25-27: *“Yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself.”* When we get to Revelation 22:4, our hope becomes a reality. These are five of the most beautiful words in all the Bible, *“They will see his face.”*

We will behold God and we will worship God! Revelation 19:1-8 and Revelation 22:3: *“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.”* We will gather for corporate worship. Read and meditate on and anticipate these things in Revelation 4:4-11 and 5:8-14.

We will shout as we consider God’s incomprehensible works. Revelation 11:15-18, *“There were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.’”*

We will sing as we behold God’s incomparable worth. We will sing loudly, *“Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!”* (Revelation 15:3).

We will live in continual worship (1 Corinthians 10:31), doing all we do perfectly. **We will serve God** in the shelter of His presence (Revelation 7:15, 22:3). And catch this—**we will be served by God.** Listen to these words in Luke 12:37: *“Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and*

he will come and serve them.” That’s why He came. *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served by to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:45).

We will be served by God and, as we’ve already seen, **we will reign with God**. Just as God gave us dominion in the beginning (Genesis 1:26-28), Daniel prophesies this in Daniel 7:27: *“And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High.”* Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:11-12, *“The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him.”* Ans John says in Revelation 3:21, *“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.”* What a statement? The “one who conquers” is a reference to the followers of Christ who persevere in faith. He will grant us to sit with Him on His throne, and we will reign with God.

We will also rest in God. *“Blessed indeed...that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them”* (Revelation 14:13). Charles Spurgeon said, “To come to Thee is to come home from exile, to come to land out of the raging storm, to come to rest after long labor, to come to the goal of my desires and the summit of my wishes.”

One day, all of our praying and all of our fasting in pursuit of God will culminate in the goal of our salvation: everlasting, uninterrupted, uninhibited, unimaginable, indescribable, all-satisfying communion with God. **So our prayer from this day until that day is constant and clear:** *“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”* (Revelation 22:20).

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