

Draw Near to Jesus

by Mark Greening

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of drawing near to God to experience His presence and love, overcoming barriers such as pride and sin.

Duration: 48:13

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Malachi 4:5-6, Matthew 6:33, Luke 15:3-32

Topics: "Jesus Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by posing a question about summarizing the entire Old Testament in one or two sentences. He then shares a personal experience of witnessing a woman who radiated the love of Christ through her face, emphasizing the importance of love over theological knowledge. The speaker then shifts to discussing the teachings of Jesus in Luke 15, specifically focusing on the parable of the prodigal son. He highlights the son's rebellion, his realization of his mistakes, and his decision to return to his father, emphasizing the theme of drawing near to God.

Transcript

Over the past two messages in James chapter 4, we have focused on how to have victory over sin in our lives through surrendering to God and resisting the devil. In James 4.7, we read, Submit yourselves then to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you. But if all there is to the Christian life is submitting to God and resisting the devil, then it won't be long before we either try giving up to be Christ-like or we become legalistic and hypocritical.

If all we are called to do is surrender and resist, then folks, I can't do it and neither can you. Submitting and resisting is not enough. As Christians, there must be an approaching, an approaching of God.

In James 4.8, in our passage this morning, we read, Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Brothers and sisters, have you ever experienced the awe and wonder of drawing near to God? Have you ever experienced God's love and power and joy when He draws near to you? Somehow over the years, the Christian life has been defined as beginning with a sinner's prayer and then continuing to obey by going through a list of do's and don'ts and acquiring all kinds of Bible knowledge and theology and serving God as best we can, but usually in the power of the flesh. Christianity has been promoted as an exercising of guidelines instead of an experiencing of God and His compassion and His filling and His delight in our lives.

This is not some strange new teaching. All the way back in Exodus, we learned that Moses had grown up listening to a godly mother, receiving all of the godly biblical teaching. He saw God at a distance in the burning bush.

He heard the voice of God on Mount Sinai. He received the Ten Commandments from the very hand of God. He saw God's power on behalf of the Jewish nation.

But that wasn't enough for Moses. He realized he needed to experience the presence of God in his life or he could not go on for God. In Exodus 33.3, we pick up the story.

God said to Moses, go up to the land flowing with milk and honey, but I will not go with you because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way. See, God was testing Moses. He was going to go with them.

He wanted to go with them, but he wanted to know whether Moses understood the principle that we will learn this morning. He says, I'm not going with you, Moses. Moses in verse 15 says, if your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.

How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? And the Lord said to Moses, I will do the very thing you have asked because I am pleased with you and I know you by name. Moses knew what we need to know this morning, brothers and sisters, and that is that the God does not go with you. You can't go.

If you don't have the presence of God in your life, you will fail as a Christian. King David knew this truth as well. After sinning with Bathsheba and committing murder, he feared God would no longer be with him.

This man who went and gloried and praised God and saw the very presence of God and felt it in the temple. He said in Psalm 51 11, we sing this song from time to time. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

You see once you've drawn near to God, you never want to go back. Go back to the old way of life. No, once you've tasted and seen that the Lord is good, brothers and sisters, you never want to go back.

God's word says to us in James 4 8, draw near to God and He will draw near to you. That's a command. It is not a suggestion.

You see, it's possible to be a Christian and know lots about the Bible and even be able to teach the Bible. It's possible to know all these things, but not experience the presence of God in your life and my life. This was very true of the religious people in Jesus' day.

In Mark 7 5, we read to the Pharisees and teachers of the law Jesus, why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders? And lots of churches are more interested in living according to the traditions of the elders than the commands of God. He replied, Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites, as it is written, these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. In other words, they had not drawn near to God.

They had all of the externals. They had all the knowledge and the theology. And oh, yes, all of the legalism and the traditions and the rules of the church.

God says, your hearts are far, you haven't drawn near to me, you haven't got it yet. One of God's commands to us this morning is that we experience his presence by drawing near to him with our hearts so that he can draw near to us. Now, before I explain what that means to draw near to God, I want to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that this is God's command and expectation for each one of us today, including you young people.

Don't let anyone ever convince you that you're not old enough or spiritual enough. You haven't learned enough to draw near to God. Never think that.

Paul said to Timothy, let no man despise your youth. And by the way, Timothy, I remember, I remember your spirit. I remember the love you had.

I remember what you learned from your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice. They were godly women. So from the time you were young, you know what it was like to be drawn to God.

That's why you're in the pastorate now. Don't ever let any man despise your youth. You don't have to be an old coot like me to experience God's love and power and nearness to you.

Second Chronicles 15.1, the spirit of God came upon Azariah, a summon of Obed. And he went out to meet Asa and he said to him, listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin, the Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you.

But if you forsake him, he will forsake you. You see, God had just given a great victory because Asa had drawn near to God and God had drawn near to him. But then some time elapses.

And as Christians, we forget to draw near to God. Verse three says, for a long time, Israel was without the true God without a priest to teach and without the law. But in their distress, they turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought him and he was found by them.

Zechariah 1.3, we read, therefore, tell the people, this is what the Lord Almighty says, you return to me, declares the Lord Almighty, and I will return to you. And there we have it. Draw near to God this morning and he will draw near to you.

Well, whatever that means, let me share an encouragement with you. The Lord is near to us at Oak Ridge in these days. And many hearts are being touched by God's love and life changing power.

In Isaiah 55.6, we read, seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near. If you seek him, he will be found by you, says 2 Chronicles 15.2. Now, what does it mean to draw near to God? Drawing near to God is simply this.

It is an attitude of the mind and heart that says God is loving and I can go to him just as I am for forgiveness and acceptance. Did you get that? Not to overcomplicate this, drawing near to God is going to God and understanding that he's loving and that I can go to him just as I am for forgiveness and acceptance. That was the principle Jesus taught in the parable of the prodigal son.

Sometimes, folks, we can overanalyze and overtheologize things. You know that? And Jesus did not teach as the Pharisees and the scribes. No, no, no.

He taught with one as authority and he taught simply so that even children could understand. And he says, okay, folks, I'm going to teach you three things real fast here in the book of Luke 15 about what it means to

You see, the Israelites were humanizing God and they weren't drawing near to Him anymore.

Brothers and sisters in Christ this morning, I want you to know that God is the most loving, caring, sensitive, understanding, gentle, approachable, forgiving, merciful, heavenly father. In Psalm 139, the psalmist says, How precious are your thoughts to me, God? Lord, right now you're thinking precious. God is thinking precious thoughts about every one of you today.

Did you know that? You say, What are precious thoughts? Well, God says, I've loved you. What do we say? What do you say to your wife? What did you used to say to your wife? Well, I'm going to get some guys in trouble today. What did you used to say? Those precious, I love you, you're special, you're wonderful, you're talented, you make me happy.

What would I have ever done without you? You're the love of my life. I see someone getting jabbed in the ribs. Those are some precious thoughts.

I just mentioned maybe five or six. You know what he goes on to say? How vast is your sum of the thoughts you think to me? Were I to count them, they would outnumber the sands of the seashore. You ever walked on a seashore? I just laid down five grains of sand.

If I threw them on that carpet, you wouldn't even see them today. And we're sinful people, brothers and sisters, and we tell one another this, or we should be. You wouldn't even notice it.

And God says, Wait, compared to my love for you today, I've thought so many things that every one of those grains of sand represents something wonderful and loving. I'm thinking about you right now. Every one of us.

Isaiah 46, 9, God says, I am God and there is no other. I am God and there is none like me. Jeremiah 31, 3 says, I have loved you with an everlasting love.

I have drawn you with loving kindness. And God wants to lasso you with that cord of loving kindness. He wants to draw you today to meet him.

And yet, somehow it is this God that we fear approaching and drawing near to. Isn't that amazing? How we have believed Satan's lies to you and me, have we not? Can we admit that sin this morning? How we have sinned by having an evil heart of unbelief according to Hebrews 3, 3, 12. The greatest sin God ever convicted me of in my life.

As I was on my knees before him one day, he says, Mark, you have an evil heart of unbelief. You don't believe this. You don't believe my love and forgiveness.

And the fact that when I forgive you, I will free you from your sin. I didn't believe that. He says, you have an evil heart, Mark, of unbelief.

You repent of that. I don't want to hear about your sins. I don't want you to confess them a million times that you have before.

You repent of the biggest sin that you commit right now. It's an evil heart of unbelief. Or don't come to me at all.

You draw near to me, and I will draw near to you today. I've mentioned this before in one of my messages, but it bears repeating for some of you who are new and those who are listening to this download. Years ago in Columbia Bible College, they did a survey of first year students and fourth year students, and the survey had 50 questions or so, and the questions were, how do you perceive your earthly father? And the students wrote down how they saw their earthly father.

They tucked away those results, and right near graduation, when all those students had been through their theology courses and their Greek and their Hebrew and all their Bible and their synthesis courses and everything else we do in Bible College and seminary, they pulled out a similar, actually it was an identical survey, but they changed the title, how do you perceive your heavenly father? Now you would think that knowing all of that stuff and all of that theology and all of that knowledge, you would think that they would have a wonderful view of God. You know that when they compiled the results, they were virtually, virtually unchanged. The way a person saw God when they started the first year of Bible College and when they left was virtually unchanged.

You know, some of you have been coming to church for years, and some of you don't see God the Father any different than you did in the day you became a Christian. You've not changed. So if God is such an unapproachable or approachable God, but we see Him as so unapproachable, if He's such an approachable God, and if we can draw near to Him so that He draws near to us, why don't we? Verse 8 tells us the reason.

It's called sin. Verse 8, we read this, come near to God, and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Grieve, mourn, and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Now there are many sins that will keep us from drawing near to God, and we've spoken about a number of these over the past few weeks, but I want to focus on three that I feel are especially opposed to our drawing near to God. Three that I prayed about this week, and I believe this was of God to bring this to your attention today. The first thing that will keep us from drawing near to God, especially, is the sin of pride.

In verse 6, that we looked at a few weeks ago, we read, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Did you know that pride is the exact opposite of drawing near to God? When we're proud, we look to ourselves, and our own abilities, and knowledge, and strength, but we do not seek God. And if we do try to seek Him, He repels or He opposes us, and we can't draw near.

You say, well what causes pride? Well there's a few things. Number one is, 1 Corinthians 8 says, we know that we all possess knowledge. Nothing wrong with knowledge here, folks.

But knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If you've allowed all of your knowledge and your theology to go to your head, it's puffed you up. You can't draw near to God.

He actually opposes you, did you know that? We can have all the Bible knowledge and theology we want, but if we'd have no love one for another in this church, then we're puffed up and proud. And God says in Proverbs 16, 5, the Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this, they will not go unpunished.

1 Corinthians 13, 1, if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

You know, I went to Bible college and seminary for five years plus. I took some other courses. I'll tell you, I heard the best speakers when I was down in Chicago, yeah.

I used to hear the best. They were good. They were godly men, godly women, and I had lots of good teachings.

And they told me I did pretty good in my courses, but I'll tell you, I want to tell you the greatest lesson God ever taught me. I was at OBC before I was changed to Tyndale, and they said, come hear this speaker. And I walked into the auditorium, and you could hear a pin drop.

You could sense the Holy Spirit just brooding over that place. As I read from an email on Wednesday, the presence of God was palpable. You could sense His presence in that room.

And the special speaker was wheeled out in a wheelchair, a woman, quadriplegic, Johnny Erickson. I don't know if you've ever heard Johnny Erickson speak or seen her. The tapes are nothing.

You should be there. You should see a video. And when she came out, I could not take my eyes off her.

She spoke for a half hour, and you know what? I don't remember a thing she said, nothing. She did not expound great theological truths, deep Bible knowledge. As she was up there, the love of Christ was so powerful, the filling of the Holy Spirit was so much upon her, that all that exuded from her face was Christ's love.

And God said to me, now Mark, I want to show you something. All that other stuff, you don't have love like her, it's nothing. The psalmist in Psalm 34 says those who look to Him are radiant, their faces are never covered with shame, and her face radiated the love of God.

We got so tied up in our Pauline theology, and Paul himself, the greatest theologian in the New Testament, in Galatians 5, verse 6, he said this, now you fill in the sentence for me. This great theologian says, the only thing that counts is, what is it, dot, dot, dot? The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. So the first thing that stops us from drawing near to God so that He draws near to us in this church, you see, God is not powerless, His Word is true.

He said He'd build the church, and we say, oh, no, no, no, wait a second, Lord, it's the church growth methods that build the church, right? God will spew that out of His mouth. Second thing that God detests and that keeps Him from drawing near is lack of love between family members. You say, what? You know, talk about lack of love in the church, I'll talk about that, but wait, let's start with lack of love for family members.

Do you know that this is an epidemic in the 19th century, and now the 20th century, and now the 21st century, do you know it's getting worse? Do you know that's prophesied? Jesus Himself said in Matthew chapter 24, 12, because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. The love of most, not some. He's talking to the religion.

He says the love of most will grow cold in the end times. Are we in the end times? The love of most is growing cold. What kind of love? You mean the love out there that we see on TV, the unsaved neighbors, the cultists, right? Paul explained further in 2 Timothy 3, 1, but mark this, there will be terrible times in the last days.

We read this last week. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of God, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy. I'm going to skip the next one.

He goes on, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness. It's talking about people in the church here, but denying its power, God's power to save and change and build and transform lives. That's who He's talking about, but I skipped one.

Let me go back to the term I skipped. He says in the end times, all of these things are going to happen, and they're going to be people, verse 3, without natural affection. It says without love in the NIV, but that's not it.

It's without natural affection. Do you know what natural affection is? God has designed the home and marriage and relationships between husbands and wives and children and parents to have a natural affection, that you naturally love one another. You know what God says? Because we're in the end times, there are going to be homes, even Christian homes, that aren't even going to have natural affection in the home for one another.

Parents not loving their children, children not loving their parents, husbands and wives not loving one another. Now I want to ask you another question. You may not see the connection here, but let's change gears for a second.

Here's a quiz for you. If you know the answer, don't yell out and don't cheat and don't look. If you're God now, and you're going to write the last verse, the last thing in all of the Old Testament, 39 books, and you've talked about creation and you've talked about the table of nations and you've talked about the flood and you've talked about Abraham and you've talked about Moses and the Jewish people and all of the kings and the prophets and the priests and all of the stories that we love to listen to, and now you've got to summarize all of that, young people, you've got to summarize all of that, and you're going to say it in one or two sentences.

What are you going to say? What's the last thing you're going to say in the whole Bible? I'm going to read it to you. Malachi chapter 4, verse 5c, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes in the end times. Also when John the Baptist came, but still, this is a double fulfillment being spoken of here.

Verse 6, He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else I will come and strike the land with a curse. Do you know why our churches aren't growing? Do you want to know why they're predicting basically the decline and almost the destruction of the evangelical movement in North America in the next 10 years? Because there's no natural affection and the curse is starting in the families and in our churches. Years ago I was mentored by one of the pastors who went through the 1972 revival, wonderful man of God.

I love getting together with him. He lived not far from me here in Oakville. Godly old man.

He used to take me out to lunch and he'd say, Mark, I'm going to teach you some things about what I learned over 40 years of ministry. What a privilege. Can't pay for that in Bible college, by the way.

One day he called me, I said, Mark, we got to get together to lunch. You're not going to believe. I've got a story to tell you.

I said, oh, he began telling the story, he says, in our church, we've been very burdened about a family, a Christian family, because the father is estranged from the daughter, a 15 year old daughter. And she is rebelling big time. She wants nothing to do with her parents.

She says she hates them. She wants nothing to do with church. She wants nothing to do with her dad, especially.

And so as a church, we began to pray, a group of us began to pray for reconciliation between the father and the daughter. The father had all the rules and regulations for the daughter, and she had all the reasons why she wouldn't listen to him. They began to pray, they began to pray.

This father was always traveling, he was hardly ever at home. Finally he comes back after a business trip and sits down to do business with his daughter and tell her why she's sinning and what she's doing wrong. And she just flew off the handle.

You see, he knew what his wife had just found. The wife had found the daughter's diary, better hide those diaries. The mother found the diary, mothers always know how to find those diaries somehow.

Mother read the diary, and the secret life of her daughter into drinking, a boyfriend that they knew nothing about, the next step was she's going to have sex with him. Mother was distraught, what am I going to do? Father tried to fix it, made it worse. And so they prayed, a group got together and they prayed that God would give natural affection to that father and natural affection to that daughter.

That God would break their hearts, and that father broke before God, he surrendered like many did at the front last week right here, he surrendered. He surrendered his business, he surrendered his time, he surrendered all these things that were more important than love, and he went to his daughter and he humbled himself, he said, sweetheart, will you forgive me? I've not loved you as I should, I've not loved you, but I love you, I want this to be right. And she forgave him, and they were reconciled, and you know, love covers over a multitude of sins.

I love, my brother Marty gave me this statement that rules without relationship leads to rebellion. You know what? God's rules that you all follow, and me, if we don't have a loving relationship, if we don't draw near to him, you know what? It leads to rebellion in our heart, and the worst form is hypocrisy. So this daughter, the father said to her, honey, I know you haven't listened to me before, but I understand that you're going away on a camping trip this weekend with three other guys, and there'll be three girls, six of you.

He says, honey, I really don't want you to go, it's not right that you go. Flee the appearance of evil, it's not right that you go. A week earlier, she would have just walked out of that house and told him where to go.

She says, okay, daddy, okay, I'll listen. She didn't go. Her boyfriend replaced her with another girl, and as they were traveling, the car rolled, and the girl that replaced this girl was killed instantly.

That close to a curse in that home. That close. That close, because of no natural affection.

Last week, I talked about one of the most touching prayers I ever heard, and it was this woman, as she wept and understanding the truths that we talked about last week and surrendering everything to God, she wept and she says, Jesus, you were so loving, you died for me, but I've never died for you. I die for you today. I surrender everything.

I wept, she wept, we all wept. One of the most touching prayers I ever heard. I want to tell you what one of the most touching prayers, no, no, no, let me rephrase that.

One of the saddest prayers I ever heard out of a little girl's mouth one day. Four years old, and she told me, she says, you know, my daddy's a Christian. She says, you know what I pray at night before I go to bed? I pray at night this, dear God, would you please change my daddy so that he loves me more? Folks, if that doesn't break your heart, I don't know what will.

This is epidemic in our families today, even our churches. If fathers do not love their children the way God the Father loves us, then the curse begins in the home, then into the church, then into the land. We are teetering on the collapse of a foundational breakdown in society.

The breakdown of society, which is loving homes, and yet everyone is distracted by this worldwide economic collapse, oblivious to the fact that the greater evil is already upon us. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else I will come and strike the land with a curse. But you know what? God the Father has already turned his heart to you this morning.

He's already turned it to you. He's calling you this morning. His heart's turned to you.

He proved it by sending Jesus to die for our sins. Come to him today. Come.

All you who are burdened and weary and I will give you rest, come. So not only does pride and lack of love in our homes and for one another stop God from moving in this place, folks, this place. Let's not talk about the church next door.

Let's not talk about what's happening around the world. This place. Listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

And he gave seven different messages to seven different churches, and this is the message he's giving to Oak Ridge today. This is the problem here. We don't love one another as we ought in the home.

We don't. We don't. But there's a third thing that stands in the way of drawing near to God, and that is lack of love between brothers and sisters in church.

You see, this is just the natural next step. We don't love in the home. How can we love in here? If you do not love your brother whom you do see, John said, how can you love God whom you don't see? And this is a hard thing to discern in a church because we all come, some of us with coats and ties, and we give the polite hellos and how do you do's and I'm fine thank you's.

No, we can look so loving. And we tell our kids, okay, we're at church now, shut up and be good. And don't embarrass mom or dad when you get out of that car.

Don't you run around. Don't make me come down there to that youth room and get you. You know, how do you discern in the church because we all look so good? How can we tell if we love one another? Well, let's take a look at what a loving church looks like and then we'll answer our question.

In Acts chapter 2, oh, let's look at Acts chapter 2, 42. Let me read for you. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer.

There is a wonderful basis and foundation for all of our church growth principles. And we pay people thousands of dollars to teach these seminars to us ad nauseum. But, but they don't go for far enough folks, because the next verse says all the believers were together.

That means they were unified. You can't be unified if you hate one another, right? They were all unified and they had everything in common, selling their possessions and good goods. They gave to anyone as they had need.

In other words, they love people enough to help them. And every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and they ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

There was hospitality. There was love because you can't eat with a glad and sincere heart next to your enemy, right? And to someone you hate or don't like in the church. Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

And what was the result? Not of the right theology, not of the right church growth methods. What was the result of love? Here it is. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Folks, if people are not being saved in this church or any other church that hears this message, I want to tell you something. There's no love as if there ought to be in that church. By this shall all men know you are my disciples.

If what? You have love one for another. God doesn't need us. I looked and there was no one to help.

So my own arm works salvation for me. He doesn't need us, folks. But where you go away to a foreign land, you have to leave your children with someone.

What do you do? You put an ad in the Toronto Sun. Adoptive parents required. Best offer.

Lowest price. You're going to do that? Let someone take care of your kids for 50 bucks a week that you don't know? Come on, folks. Is God any different than us as sinful parents? He says, wait a second.

I can save. I can save those people there. I can save those people over there.

I can save people all over this town, this city, this province. And I'm looking somewhere. I'm looking for somewhere where there are loving people to send them to.

That's why God doesn't send people to churches. Because they won't be loved. But God says, I love you.

And if you draw near to me, I'm going to draw near to you this morning. And I'll shed my love abroad in your heart to such a strong degree that you might cry out to stop. Would to God we all have that experience before leaving here today.

1 Peter 1.22. Again, another command, not a suggestion. It says, love one another deeply from the heart. A loving church is a church where God saves.

Where God builds the church. Even if it means tearing it down first. Person by person or family by family.

But he will accomplish his purposes in this place. Isaiah 59.1 says, surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God.

Your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear. But if we draw near to God, he will draw near to us. The Lord will add to our numbers those who are being saved.

Those who are being freed. Those who will be loved. Those who will be taught and disciplined and encouraged to the Lord.

He'll add to our number daily these. Oh, that famous verse we've all heard before. 2 Chronicles 7.14. If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray.

And seek my face, theirs drawing near. And turn from their wicked ways, theirs resisting the sin of pride and lack of love. Then will I hear from heaven, will forgive their sins and heal their land.

Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers. To the prayers often offered in this place. On Wednesdays we pray and God is answering our prayers.

He's beginning to answer our prayers on behalf of one another. And that prayer means, do you know what? If you have to miss anything, miss this. Miss the preaching.

Because the power of the preaching begins in the power of the prayer on Wednesdays. That is the most important meeting that is held right now at Oak Ridge. In any church, it should be.

If we seek him, if you seek me, I will be found by you. Draw near to me today and I will draw near to you. And all of this is dependent upon us drawing near to God and having him draw near to us.

This morning, communion is a representation of a remembering of God and a drawing near to God. Drawing near to him. That's what it is.

Drawing near to remember him. Knowing that he is a loving God. Having experience that he is a loving God.

Drawing near to God and repentance of the lack of love and pride for others. Drawing near to him. But today the Lord is laid on my heart.

We're not having communion. We're not going to have it today. You can blame me.

None of the other elders knew about this. God is laid on my heart. We're not having communion today.

It's just so much hypocrisy, folks, to pretend to draw near to God when we haven't in our hearts. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion. Come.

The only way you will come to God and draw near to him is if you can see God as the sinful woman did who came to Jesus. I want to finish with one story. You remember Jesus went to Simon's house.

And Simon, this religious righteous man who knew so much, welcomed Jesus in, but he didn't really welcome him because he didn't wash his feet and he didn't put oil on his head. And he just treated him like a second class and he just ushered him in. And as Jesus was there, we read that a sinful woman from the town, a prostitute, a prostitute walked in, a former prostitute walked in and fell at Jesus' feet.

And with her tears, she wept and drenched his feet. And with her long hair, she washed his feet. And Simon, the Pharisee, looked and he said to himself, if this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman this was.

And Jesus, you don't say that in front of someone like Jesus, who knows all things. And Jesus, knowing his thoughts, said, Simon, I'm going to tell you a story. And he went, he told a story about two people.

One person was forgiven a big debt and one person was forgiven a small debt. And he says, Simon, now tell me who would be more appreciative and thankful and loving towards his master? The one who has been forgiven lots or the one who was forgiven little? And Simon says, well, I suppose the one who was forgiven most. And Jesus says, you've answered wisely.

You see this woman who came to me? Since the time she came in, she has not stopped weeping and washing my feet. Because Simon, whoever has been forgiven much, loves much. But whoever has been forgiven little, loves little.

Do you know what the interesting thing is in this story? And we don't read it, but it has to be assumed. Is this woman, who of all the stories that Jesus could include and did include, the Bible includes, she's one of them for us today. Somewhere between the time that Jesus got there and in some time in the past, Jesus met her on the street somewhere.

He met her. And she drew near to him because she knew that he was loving. She had seen him.

She had heard his stories. He talked to the little children. He loved them.

He loved everyone who came to him. She saw his love and she says, I can trust him. I'm going to him.

And as she drew to him, he came to her and he met her and he forgave her all of her sins. We pick up the story here. She was so appreciative of all the sins that he forgave her for and she loved him.

She drew near a second time. You see, once you draw near to God once, folks, you'll never want to stop drawing near to him every day. And if we draw near to God in this church, in this place, you will never want to go back to being without him.

Never, ever. So what we're going to do, I'm going to ask Cliff to come and just sing a solo as the Lord leads him. But as I mentioned last week, my house shall be called a house of prayer.

Not just on Wednesdays. Many people came to pray last week at the front. This is not an altar call.

This is just prayer. Talking with God. Maybe you're here this morning and you've never come to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

Jesus says that if you believe in your heart that God raised them from the dead, believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord and that God raised them from the dead, you will be saved. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. He will save you today if you call on him in sincerity.

He loves you. He met you halfway when he died for you. He came from heaven to earth.

And all you have to do is go to the cross today and he'll save you. Some of you this morning have been Christians for years. You've been afraid to draw near to God because you listen to the lies of the enemy.

But today Jesus bids you come. Come and pray with others at the front. Just pray by yourself.

If you want someone to pray with you, you look up and someone will be there to pray with you. But come and surrender if you didn't do it last week. Come and seek the Lord.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Call on him. He will save.

He will deliver. He will hear and answer your prayer. Come as the Lord leads you to come.

For those who must leave, you may leave. And I would just encourage you just to talk quietly and talk in the foyer if you can. Just so that the rest of us who are praying might pray and allow God to move.

May God bless you.

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