

God's Drawing Power Exercised Toward His People

AN EXPOSITION OF JOHN 12:32

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." (John 12:32)

The above words, spoken by our Lord, are among the most often-quoted and yet the most misunderstood and misinterpreted of any of the words in the Bible. Rightly understood, this Scripture, like all others, is a very God-honoring statement. Misunderstood and misinterpreted, it dishonors Christ by reducing Him from an all-powerful Savior to a poor, weak beggar who is frustrated in the great majority of cases in His efforts to save men from their sins.

In these words our Savior was speaking of His death on the cross, and what would be accomplished as a result of that death. There are several elements of this short verse that need to be examined in order to gain a proper understanding of these words of Jesus. First, what did He mean by the word "draw"? Secondly, who are the "all men" under consideration here? Thirdly, did Jesus do what He said He would do? This last question may seem entirely out of place to the reader who loves God and His Word. But let me assure you that this question is very pertinent to a discussion of the Scripture under consideration. Today many people, even many sincere lovers of God, are saying, oftentimes without realizing it; that Jesus did not accomplish what He set out to accomplish, but that He was disappointed in perhaps seventy-five percent or higher, of the work that He came to do.

Let us examine each of these points with a prayerful heart that God will, indeed "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of they law." (Psalms 119:18).

THE WORD "DRAW" AS USED IN SCRIPTURE

We must gain a proper understanding of the word "draw" as it is used in the Bible if we are to gain a proper understanding of the passage we are studying. It is going to be immediately apparent, even on a brief examination of the New Testament, that the word translated "draw" in John 12:32 has a great deal more power in it that is commonly attributed to it today in most books and sermons.

The common but erroneous idea of God's drawing power that is held by many people today goes something like this: "God is wooing every human being, trying to get them to accept Him as their personal Savior. God draws them to Him by moral persuasion; He doesn't force them to come. He tries to influence them to love Him, much as a young man tries to influence a young woman with whom he is in love to become his bride. God is standing with open arms pleading and begging the sinner to let Him come into his heart. But this drawing has no force in it; it is possible to reject this drawing power and, in fact, the majority of people do reject this drawing power and spurn the offer of God's mercy and love, leaving Him disappointed and heart-broken." This common idea of God's drawing is brought out very well in a verse of the very popular song much sung today, "Softly and Tenderly, Jesus is Calling." The verse reads, "Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading, pleading for you and for me? Why should we linger and heed not His mercies, Mercies for you and for me?"

But when we turn to the Bible we get a very different idea of the force of the word "draw." The Biblical use of the word indicates that God exercises great power, indeed irresistible power, when He draws men to Himself. The only way to honestly study the Bible is to study it impartially, with no preconceived ideas of what it teaches, and thus let it speak for itself. This is, admittedly, a very difficult thing to do, and requires much spiritual labor and prayer; it is much easier to believe something because you have always been taught it, or because some man says it, than it is to go to God in sincere prayer, ask Him for understanding, and then spend some hard mental and spiritual effort searching God's Word. Most people are not willing to do this, hence much misunderstanding of the teaching of the Scriptures in the day that we live in.

To see for ourselves how the writers of Scripture used the word "draw" we must examine every passage which contains the word under consideration and see what force or power is implied in the word. Many of these passages deal with purely natural things of the physical world, but, instead of this being a disadvantage, it is a distinct advantage. God often uses natural examples in the Bible to teach us spiritual lessons. When He shows us the force of a word in the natural, physical world that we can understand with our physical senses, we can more easily understand the meaning of the word when it speaks of spiritual things that we cannot observe with our physical senses (such as hearing, touching, seeing, etc.).

The word translated "draw" in John 12:32 is a New Testament Greek word HELKUO or HELKO. If we can see how it is used in other places, we can more readily understand how it is used in John 12:32.

The word is used in John 18:10 where it says that ". . . Simon Peter having a sword **drew** it . . ." Peter exercised sovereign, irresistible force on this sword. The sword didn't cooperate with Peter in the drawing, because it was unable to. And, likewise, the dead sinner is unable to cooperate with God, because he is spiritually dead (not sick--dead!) (Eph. 2:1) and must be drawn by a powerful God to Jesus Christ for salvation.

The very same word is used in John 21:11 where "Simon Peter went up, and **drew** the net to land full of great fishes . . ." Here again, we see the great force of the word "draw" in Scripture. Peter drew the net in because he had the **power** to do so, not because the fish were willing to cooperate with him. If Peter had waited until the fish were willing and ready to draw them in, he would never have drawn that net.

In Acts 16:19 the identical word is used. Here, some Philippian slave-owners got mad at Paul and Silas and ". . . they caught Paul and Silas, and **drew** them into the marketplace unto the rulers." Why were they able to draw Paul and Silas into the marketplace? Because they had **greater power** than did Paul and Silas. The only reason God is able to draw a spiritually dead sinner to Himself (or to Christ) is because He has greater power than the sinner. Otherwise the sinner would never come. A similar incident occurred in Acts 21:30 where some Jews were determined to kill Paul and ". . . took Paul and **drew** him out of the temple." Paul was drawn here because a superior force was operating on him. Thus, again, we gain insight into the way the word "draw" is used in the New Testament.

In yet another book of the Bible the same word is used with equal force. In James 2:6 we read: "Do not rich men oppress you, and **draw** you before the judgment seats." There is one thing for certain; the poor, oppressed poor men didn't go before the judge because they wanted to, because they were willing to cooperate with their oppressors. They went because they were **drawn** by superior force.

These verses that we have considered give an accurate application of the word we are studying, especially as it is used in the physical world. A further substantiation of the power of this word can be found in the use of this word in the Classical Greek language, from which our New Testament Greek developed. Liddell and Scott in their Greek-English Lexicon give some of the following meanings to the same word we are studying: "to draw ships down to the sea; of mules, to draw a chariot; to draw the plough through the field; to draw a bow." In every one of these examples, as in each of the above Scriptural examples, the idea is that a stronger power, a superior force **draws** an object.

When we begin to examine the word as it is used in speaking of spiritual things it can immediately be seen that the word retains the same force and power with which it was used in the physical world. John is the only writer to use this word concerning a

purely spiritual subject, and remember that this is the same John who used the very same word, in the very same book, with the very same force, concerning the physical world (John 18:10; John 21:11). In John 6:44 Jesus Christ says, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me **draw** him: and I will raise him up at the last day." How powerful, how effective is this drawing force? It is powerful enough and sufficiently effective that it works perfectly in every case in which it is used. Jesus shows this in John 6:37 where He says, "**All** that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." This drawing power **never** fails; when it is exerted on an individual he is actually drawn to Christ by an overwhelming force that he can't resist.

Many people misunderstand when this drawing power is spoken of and believe that we are teaching that God saves a man against his own will and just drags him to Jesus, while he is hating to go there. But this is far from the truth. God doesn't save a man against his will, but He changes the man's will when He saves him. David says in Psalm 110:3, "Thy people shall be **willing** in the day of Thy power . . ." In the day of what power? In the day of the drawing power of God. Paul says in Philippians 2:13, "For it is God which worketh in you both to **will** and to do of His good pleasure." This giving of a new will when God draws us to Him is seen dramatically in the case of the Apostle Paul. He had been persecuting Christ up to the **very moment** of being **drawn** to Christ. But immediately after being drawn to Christ, Paul demonstrated that his will had been radically changed by crying out, ". . . Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Paul wasn't angry because the Lord had drawn him; he now wanted to do the will of God.

Jeremiah 31:3 speaks of this same drawing power in the words of God: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I **drawn** thee." Many people mistake this lovingkindness as having no power in it, but not so. Just because this is an act of lovingkindness doesn't mean that it is not an act of irresistible power. If I see one of my children run into the path of a speeding automobile, I will draw him back out of danger with lovingkindness because I love him. But

I will also draw him with whatever power is necessary to actually rescue him from danger.

Seeing that the Scriptures teach that this drawing power of God is so effective that it always works, now it will be necessary to search the Bible to see who it is that God draws to Himself.

WILL EVERY HUMAN BEING BE SAVED?

Most people teach today that the "all men" in John 12:32 is referring to every single member of the human race. But most of them have failed to realize what this interpretation logically leads to. According to the simple definition of the words used here, if every member of the human race is included, then they will all be saved and there will be no one in hell! This is called Universalism. There are some few people in the world who do believe in universal salvation of the entire human race, but no Bible-believer believes this, because there are too many plain, unmistakable passages of Scripture that teach there will be a number of individuals confined in a burning, eternal hell.

But Universalism is just exactly what John 12:32 teaches if the "all men" refer to every member of the human race. Notice again the language of the verse: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, **will draw** all men unto me." To anyone that has even an elementary understanding of the English language this is a concise, emphatic statement of **fact**. This is not a conditional statement or a statement of possibility. Jesus did not say He would try to draw all men to Himself, or that He would merely exert a drawing influence. He simply said that He would draw, that is **actually** draw "all men" unto Him. So whoever the "all men" are here, they will all be drawn to Christ. If the "all men" here are the entire human race then this verse is teaching universal salvation. But as we have seen, this is Scripturally impossible, so **who** are the "all men?"

CHRIST DIED FOR AND WILL SAVE ALL HIS PEOPLE

The Scriptures plainly state that Christ came to the earth to accomplish a particular mission, and that He accomplished that mission completely and without failure. Christ speaks plainly of His own mission when He says, "For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of **all** which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." (John 6:38,39). This is a plain statement; God gave some people to Christ, and Christ lost **not one** of them but they **all** will be raised up at the last day. We have already seen that this can't be the entire human race.

Who are they, then? Scripture calls them by several names:

- (1) "His people" -- Matt. 1:21
- (2) "My sheep" -- John 10:11,27
- (3) "The elect" -- II Tim. 2:10 and many other names.

Concerning our specific text, John 12:32, it would be well to show that many times in Scripture the terms "all", "all men" and the like are restricted to a certain class of people. The actual meaning of "all" in many places in the Bible is "all who are under consideration."

Let us again turn to the Bible with an open, unprejudiced, unbiased mind and let the Scriptures speak to us themselves concerning this matter. Who are the "all" in John 6:37? "All that the Father giveth me . . ." The Holy Spirit restricted the "all" with the modifying phrase "that the Father giveth me." He didn't say "all the human race." In Matt. 3:5,6 we read, "Then went out to Him Jerusalem and **all** Judea, and **all** the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of Him in Jordan, confessing their sins." Does this "all" mean that every single human being from Judea and Jerusalem came and were baptized by John? Certainly not! A few verses following plainly state that John refused to baptize many of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Bible writer was merely using a statement much like we would today if we were to say, for instance, "The **whole town** has gone to the ball game." We would not mean by a statement like this that every single person in town has gone to the ball game, but that the great majority have gone. This is how the Biblical writers often used the word "all."

One more example should be sufficient to show the open-minded reader that the word "all" seldom refers to the whole human race when used in the Bible. In Luke 2:10, the angel said at the birth of Jesus Christ, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to **all** people." Did this mean that every single member of the human race would rejoice when Jesus was born? Of course not! What about King Herod? Was he happy? Matt. 2:3 tells us that he was "troubled." So who were the "all people" in Luke 2:10? Simply this -- all the people of God. Who then are the "all men" in John 12:32? All the children of God. Will the Lord lose a one of them? Not a single one. Will the Lord be frustrated because He can't save all the ones He desires to? No. Why? He exercises His sovereign drawing power towards them, and lovingly but powerfully draws them to Himself.

HAVE YOU BEEN DRAWN TO GOD?

This is a very important question that should deeply concern each of us. For if God does draw us to Christ we will be **eternally** blessed. But if He doesn't draw us to Him we will suffer the terrible wrath of God for ever and ever, without end! So it should be of supreme interest to us whether we have been drawn by God.

Thankfully, the Bible gives us some evidence whereby we can tell if we have been drawn to Him. I Thess.1: 4,5 tells us we are of the "elect" if the preaching of the gospel comes to us in power and changes our lives. If the gospel of Christ is just so much foolishness to you and you consider it a waste of time to go to church and hear the gospel preached, you have no right to believe that God has drawn you.

I John 3:14 tells us "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." Do you love God's people? Really love them, not just from the lips? Love them enough that you would forgive them even if they wronged you? Love them enough to defend them if someone is talking about them behind their backs? Would you be willing to show your love to them in deed (maybe even with your pocketbook) as well as in word? If we can

say, "yes" to these questions then we have been drawn to God. If we must say, "no" we cannot say that God has drawn us to Him.

Beloved, we need to examine ourselves continually for evidences of God's drawing power in our lives. John said, "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (I John 2:4).

Has God drawn you to Him?

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