

HONEST PRAYERS

Mercy, Mercy Me!

Luke 18:9-14

A Warning About Pride

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

- When Jesus wanted to communicate a specific point, He often used parables
- Jesus tells a parable that is directed at self-centered people
- Jesus describes three types of self-centered people:
 1. Those who are *self-sufficient*, they *trust* in themselves
 2. Those who are *self-righteous*
 - Self-centered people are self-righteous
 - The self-righteous *differ* from the self-sufficient because they are interested in righteousness and in God
 3. Those who *despise* others
 - To despise others is to look down upon, to count as nothing, unimportant or insignificant
 - Self-centered people look down on other people
- Jesus directed this parable as an *appeal and a warning* to people who considered themselves as self-sufficient, self-righteous, and those who despise others

A Pharisee and a Publican in the Temple

[10] Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

- Jesus says two men went to the temple to pray
- There is no better place to pray than the house of God
- Both men were praying to *please* God
- They both were seeking God
- The *only* difference was one was a “Pharisee” and the other was a “publican”
- *Pharisees* were devout teachers of the Mosaic Law
- They were so devout they even added literally hundreds of self-made “commandments” or rules that they expected people to live by
- *Publicans* were “tax collectors” for the Roman government and they were often dishonest and as a result became very wealthy
- These two men with two very different *lifestyles* and *reputations* went to the temple to pray

The Pharisee

[11] The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. [12] I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

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- The Pharisee *stood and prayed* which was the common practice during public services
- He prayed *within* or *to* himself
- He addressed God *by name*, but this was not a prayer *to* God
- Then he “thanked” God he was not “as bad” as other people
 - The Pharisee was glad he was not like other people who were extortioners, unjust, adulterers, publicans, etc.
- He thanked God that he had been kept from the *public sins*
- He was more concerned about his “reputation” than his *relationship* with God
- He even thanked God he wasn’t “like” *this publican* who was nearby
- The Pharisee viewed himself above such *lowly behavior* and *lowly people*
- Pride causes us to *compare* and look down on anyone who is not like us or worse off than us
- The Pharisee then proceeds to brag to God about the “works” he’s done
- He fasts twice a week
- He gives tithes of “everything” he possessed
- The Pharisee wanted to “prove” his righteousness by his going beyond what was required by the Word of God
- The Pharisee believed there was nothing else to be done, he was already righteous enough
- He didn’t think asking God for favor or grace was even necessary because he had it all together
- The Pharisee shows us, we can be in the *right place* of prayer, have the *right posture* of prayer, and even call the *right person* in prayer and it **not** even be a prayer

The Publican

[13] And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

- The publican prays and the first thing you notice is his *stance*, he *stood afar off*
- The publican kept his head down because he felt he was *unworthy* to face God
- The publican beat his chest because he was disappointed and angry with himself
- The publican cried out to God; “...***God be merciful to me a sinner.***”
- The publican called himself a *sinner*; he called himself what he was, he didn’t minimize or water-down his actions
- Many will try to justify their sins, but the publican did not
- The publican simply prayed God be merciful to me a sinner

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- The publican simply asks God for mercy and forgiveness
- The phrase *be merciful* means *atoning sacrifice*
- We can see the publican's humility in his posture, his actions, and his words confessing himself as a sinner
- The publican understood what too many people miss, it was not his "righteousness or any good works" that would qualify him for a *relationship* with God, it was God's *mercy*

The Difference

[14] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

- The Pharisee went home just as he came: *proud, self-righteous, and condemned*
- The publican went home *justified* or righteous
- The publican goes home justified by grace ***Ephesians 2:8-9 (KJV) 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.***
- The most scandalous of sinners is justified by God
- The justified person is *not righteous*, but is *counted righteous* by God
- Anytime we get lifted up in pride, we can expect a fall
- When we remain humble, God will raise us up *even* when we fall
- Prayer is more than maintaining *outward* appearances
- God honors the humble and resists the proud ***Proverbs 29:23 (KJV) A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.***
 - We can't trust in ourselves for righteousness
- Humility is necessary to gain forgiveness

Application

1. We must *pray like a publican* with no hint of pride, arrogance, self-righteousness, self-centeredness, or self-sufficiency
2. We must pray with humility, honesty, and modesty
3. Come to God's presence *as you are* and then *tell it like it is*
4. Be quick to repent and ask God for mercy ***Isaiah 55:7 (KJV) 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.***