

JESUS ON TALKING TO GOD

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

- [0 : 0 0] Father, teach us to talk to you. Help us to talk to you. Father, you know that many of us are afraid of talking to you about certain matters.
- Maybe matters that are too hard for us to bring to you. Father, you know that some of us have given up talking to you about certain matters because we've lost heart. We don't believe that you hear.
- It feels as if we talk to just empty space when we talk to you about certain things. Father, you know those amongst us who struggle with talking to you because we have given up and lost heart.
- Father, you know how easy it is for us to talk to you in ways that's really just talking about only ourselves and how we can look down on others and not even be aware of it.
- Father, we ask that you would gently but deeply pour out your Holy Spirit upon us to teach us and help us to talk to you, to pour out our heart to you, to be honest with you, to hold nothing back in talking to you.
- [1 : 0 3] Father, this is our prayer. This is our cry. Teach us from your word. And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your son and our savior. Amen. Please be seated.
- Amen. So another Starbucks story. They should start paying for my coffee, I suppose.
- I don't know. So just a couple of weeks ago, a Jewish friend of mine at a Starbucks, and he knows I'm a Christian, he knows a pastor, and he came up to me and he said to me, George, George, he said, why aren't Christians doing something about what's happening to other Christians in the Middle East?
- He said, do Christians know just that, and he used the word genocide, he said, does he know that, do the Christians in Canada know the genocide that's going on in places like Iraq and Syria against Christians?
- Why? This is a Christian nation. That's what he said to me. This is a Christian nation. Why are you silent and doing nothing about such genocide? And so we talked about it for 10 minutes or so, and I'm not going to tell you everything that I said, although partly, I guess, by sharing it with you, I'm doing at least a tiny bit about it.
- [2 : 2 5] And I did tell him that at least in our church, we pray for persecuted Christians. And I also, we had a bit of a conversation as to whether or not Canada's a Christian nation and what it means to be a Christian.
- But, you know, still sort of that is a bit of a challenge for us, that there is genocide as a killing of people, really usually for racial lines, and of course, Christians are not of one particular race or culture.
- We come from every race and culture, but there still is such a slaughter going on there. Some people would maybe wonder that the reason that we Christians don't speak up about such matters is because our Bible tells us not to speak up, that our Bible tells us to be like little children, that our Bible tells us to grovel, like Jesus' parable.
- Some might say that the tax collector was groveling, and if we are being taught to grovel, then we won't stand up. If we're taught to be like little children, we won't stand up.

And so part of the reason that that slaughter goes on is because our Bible is teaching us to not stand up. Well, let's look and see what the Bible actually says about some of these issues.

[3 : 43] So if you have your Bibles, please turn in them to Luke chapter 18, beginning at verse 1, and we're going to look at those. There's sort of three little units of teaching. Some of you who are familiar with the Bible, all three of them are quite familiar.

Others of you who are maybe newer on the Christian walk or are seekers, some of them might have come to you as a bit of a surprise. But let's, one of them, the thing about children is in three of the Gospels, but let's look at this and see, is the Bible in fact encouraging us to grovel?

Is it encouraging us to never stand up for ourselves? And what on earth is Jesus doing with these different analogies? And why does he compare God to an unjust judge?

So Luke chapter 18, beginning at the first verse, and here's how it goes. And Jesus told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Just sort of pause here before we read. This is going to be a bit of a different sermon than others, because in this sermon, I mean, in these three texts, especially the first two, Jesus basically gives the purpose of the parable and he tells us what the parable's about.

[4 : 56] Often that happens, by the way, in the parables, but in these two particular things, Jesus sort of tells us what the point is. And here it is in first one. An old Christian writer who wrote about, you know, many hundreds of years ago said that in these parables, it's Jesus left the key to the parable outside the door.

So that you had the key that you could open up the meaning of the parable and he gives it to you outside the door as you come up to the parable, rather than at the end or maybe a few verses after the parable.

So this is going to be the purpose of the first parable. He told them this parable, verse one, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

And so how does he sort of illustrate that or try to bring it home? He tells a parable, verse two. He said, in a certain city, there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected men.

And that's sort of a general Christian teaching about other times, some other time I'll talk about the fear of God, but it's sort of a very common Christian understanding, New Testament understanding that we are to have a fear of God, but we are to respect human beings.

[6 : 03] Most of us struggle with fearing human beings and completely and utterly ignoring God. But the Bible tries to encourage us to understand that we're not to fear human beings, that we're to have a fear of God, which we'll talk about some other time, but we're to respect human beings.

Anyway, so verse two again. He said, in a certain city, there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected men. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, give me justice against my adversary.

Just sort of pause here. Some of you have rich imaginative lives and you picture things. So when you're picturing this widow, don't necessarily picture an old woman.

In the ancient world, at the time of Jesus, women were usually given in marriage at the age of 13 or 14. So this widow could be 15.

Okay? She could be 15 or 16. She could be very, very, very young. And as well as that, given the context of the parable, it's probably some type of, it's probably something to do with inheritance, mentioning the widow.

[7 : 16] In other words, her adversaries are her family, who would have controlled the inheritance from their son who died and are probably withholding it from her.

Okay? So if you want to sort of enter into it imaginatively, that's what's sort of going on. I mean, it could be an old woman, but it could very well be just somebody who's 15. And so we read verse 3 again.

And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to the unjust judge and saying, give me justice against my adversary. For a while, the unjust judge refused, but afterward he said to himself, and it's really interesting what he says to himself.

It shows that he's not bothered in the least by the fact that he doesn't fear God or respect people. He knows that about himself. He still has a good night's sleep every night. I mean, that's just the way some of us are, isn't it?

It's not the fact that we deal with people who might oppress others and then go home and have tormented sleep. The world is filled with people who do horrendous things to other people and then have a really good night's sleep.

[8 : 23] And they know they do horrendous things to other people. And that's what's being portrayed here with the judge. He knows about himself. It doesn't bother him at all. It doesn't stir anything within him whatsoever about repentance or amendment of life.

So listen to how he speaks to about himself. Verse four, for a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming, coming back to him time and time and time again.

Sort of going to be, it's relevant for the prayer. The woman doesn't have family connections. She doesn't have wealth. She doesn't have a social system that's going to force the judge to act.

She only has one thing, persistence. That's a very relevant thing for us. Some of us have high IQs. Some of us are, IQs aren't very high.

Some of us are rich. Some of us are well off. Some of us aren't. Some of us are well educated. Some of us aren't. Different races, different nationalities, different ethnic groups, different things.

[9 : 39] The Bible isn't telling us we have to all have high IQs or high income or high education. If it did, it would leave a lot of us out. What it's telling us about is something that we all can potentially do, which is persist.

To persist. To persist. It's something within the grasp of every person who hears. So verse six, and the Lord said, hear what the unrighteous judge says, and will not God give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night?

Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?

Now, I'm not going to talk about unanswered prayer today. One of the reasons I'm not going to talk about unanswered prayer today is that in a couple of weeks, we're going to deal with the most famous example in the New Testament of unanswered prayer, where Jesus asks for something that he doesn't get.

So I thought, and you can remind me when you can see it coming up, that I'll talk about unanswered prayer that particular week. I'm not going to talk this morning about those of us who struggle with talking to God about when we've talked to him about all sorts of things and nothing seems to have happened.

[11 : 04] We'll talk about that in another day. But the thing that we need to sort of, there's some other things here that we need to see about the text. And the first one is this.

This is the point, if you could put it up, Andrew. As I walk with Jesus and others on the Jesus way, he wants me to talk to him again and again and again and never lose heart.

That's what Jesus wants. That's what he's asking you and me to do. The Jesus way is not a private way. It's personal, but it's not private.

Jesus, we all enter into the Jesus way one by one when we put our faith in Jesus and trust what he's done for us. We trust his person and his work. But we walk the Jesus way.

In other words, we live our lives 24-7 lives. We walk it with Jesus and with others. That's what the Jesus way is. And so these first three points that I'm going to share with you, they're always going to begin with this same phrase.

[12 : 02] As I walk with Jesus and others on the Jesus way, here's the first thing. He wants me to talk to him again and again and again and again and again and again and never lose heart.

That's what he wants. He wants to commune with me and have communion with me. And it tells me something about who I am and about who God is.

It's quite astounding that he wants me to talk to him. He wants you to talk to him. Now, my wife is not able to be at church today because somebody foolishly put the car keys to the van in their pocket and left the house.

And you're looking at him. So, yeah, I feel really bad about it. I really do. I got a text and I got, oh, dang.

Anyway, so, but here's the thing. If I go back to Louise and after I've apologized to her, I said to her, you know, Louise, I've had a great spiritual breakthrough. I'm no longer going to talk to you.

[13 : 08] I'm going to meditate in your presence. I'm going to do yoga in your presence. I'm going to do rituals in your presence, but I'm not going to talk to you.

Well, that would fly like a lead balloon, right? In fact, if I tried to actually meditate in her presence, she'd probably hit me, you know, slap me or punch me, you know, in a playful wake-up type of way to try to get my attention, right?

Because in a marriage, you talk to each other. I mean, you have times when you're just silent in the house and maybe you have times when you're mad at each other and you're silent because you're mad, but, and sometimes you're just silent because you're comfortable with each other, but you talk.

You talk to each other. And so, you see, this is one of the things which is so astounding about the Jesus way is that in many other ways, like in most Eastern religions, you don't talk to God.

The primary thing you do is you follow certain types of steps or processes and maybe you learn how to do yoga as part of a process of self-enlightenment, of getting in touch with the God within or the God without or whatever it is, but you don't actually talk to God.

[14 : 17] And it's because that, it doesn't mean that the biblical account is true, but it's just important that you understand it, is that the Bible portrays that God is a God that we talk to.

He wants us to talk to him. He doesn't want us to be in his presence just meditating or doing yoga or doing rituals. He wants us to talk to him.

And it's because God is personal and we are made in his image as personal beings and so we are to talk, to talk to him again and again and again and again and again.

The other thing is that some of you might say, well, why does God want us to talk to him again and again and again and again? Many of you have maybe heard the famous saying by Einstein that one definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and over again hoping for a different result.

And so for some people, the idea that we would talk to God time and time and time and time again hoping for a different result, that if we think that way or we feel that way, then what we're doing is we're not thinking of God as a person.

[15 : 35] We're thinking of God as something like a machine, something completely and utterly impersonal. So for instance, if you go to your bank machine and you type in your PIN number and it doesn't work and then you type in your PIN number and it doesn't work and then you type in your PIN number and it doesn't work and you type in your PIN number and it doesn't work and you have some type of disorder and it doesn't work.

And in fact, actually, as you know, with machines, machines that are impersonal, they don't sort of say, oh yeah, that's sort of in the ballpark of the PIN number, so I'm going to accept it, because I know the person's heart.

No, it has to be exactly, precisely right, and if your PIN number doesn't work, it means either you've got the wrong PIN number or the machine's broken or something's happened, and that's how impersonal things work.

But, you know, my wife and I have to talk about things time and time and time and time again. I know sometimes I'm a real slow learner, and that's just, you don't just talk about your kids once and then that's good for the next 30 years.

You talk about your kids all the time. You talk about your relationship. You talk about your plans. You maybe go over the same thing over and over and over again about just, you've just got to talk it through, and that's what Jesus is saying.

[16 : 55] He's saying that in our relationship with himself, that in our relationship with our Father, we're to talk to him again and again and again and again and again and again, not give up talking.

And, you know, sometimes later on in your life, like later on in my life, I'll think back to some of the things I asked God for that bothered me that he didn't give them to me, and I'm so happy in hindsight that he didn't give those things to me.

It would have been not good for my life if he'd answered my prayer exactly the way I wanted him to answer my prayer. And often, and other times when I'm praying and praying and praying and talking about the same type of thing, and by the way, don't think that I'm really great at persistence in prayer.

One of the things you can do is pray for me that I will be better at praying with persistence. Please pray for me that that will happen. Pray for our church that we will be a church that prays and talks to God time and time and time and time again, that we'll trust in prayer more than we'll trust in techniques, that we'll trust in prayer more than we'll trust in our own abilities or the things that we can do.

Pray that we will be a congregation that talks to God again and again and again and again. And sometimes as we talk to God again and again and again and again, we realize that we need to sort of switch in the things that we're talking about, that God teaches us as we talk to him.

[18 : 14] He tells us of something new that we have to become or something new that we have to do or something new that we have to, something that we've been doing for a long time, we have to stop doing because prayer changes us.

And that's what Jesus is telling us to do. As I walk with Jesus and others on the Jesus way, he wants me to talk to him again and again and again and again and again and again and never lose heart.

Now, some of you might say, George, are you saying that Christians are better prayers than others? And George, if Christians are such good prayers, why is it that, I mean, you began this thing by talking about the terrible things going on for Christians in the Middle East, Christian communities that have existed for 1,900-plus years all being obliterated and emptied.

Many of them killed and then they have to flee. What about their prayers? Maybe the Muslims pray better than the Christians because the Muslims seem to be kicking butt over there and the Christians are the butts that are being kicked.

Does that mean that Muslims are better prayers than Christians? Like, are you saying that, but are you saying that Christians are better at praying than others? Like, what's going on with this talk about how we are to be persistent in prayer?

[19 : 42] Is Jesus talking about us somehow being better at things or knowing more than others? And what's he saying? Well, let's read the next thing that Jesus talks about because Jesus gives these sort of three, actually, it's four linked things, but we're going to talk about the rich man next week.

What is Jesus saying? Well, let's look that he continues to sort of help to unfold how we are to talk to him and what's the attitude and the heart attitude that we are to have when we talk to Jesus and we talk to the Father.

Let's look at verse 9. He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt. So just pause.

Remember I said to you that in these two parables, in some ways Jesus gives the key to the parable on the outside of the door so that we can unlock it. This is partially the point of the sermon and more primarily the target.

Sorry, not partially the point of the parable, but primarily the target of the parable. Okay? He's zeroing in on something. And he's zeroing in on those of us, on those disciples and others who trust in themselves that they were righteous and treat others with contempt.

[21 : 01] Two men, verse 10, went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. But the tax collector standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, God, be merciful to me.

And actually, literally in the Greek, it's the sinner. And it's emphatic. God, be merciful to me, the sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted. Just go up to verse 11 again. Did you notice the I language of the first prayer?

There's a difference between making our prayers personal and having our prayers be all about us with the royal I, the royal ego at the heart of our prayers.

[22 : 18] And this man isn't making his prayers personal. It's all this I language. Five times he says I. Look at that. God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners and just adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. That's the heart of this guy's prayer. And I don't know how many of you have seen the movie Braveheart.

By the way, when I say a movie like this, it's pretty gory and stuff, so I'm not necessarily recommending it. But you might remember, isn't this scene an Irish guy, of course, who says that it's an other way.

He talks to God all the time, and he says an Irishman has to talk to God because he can't find an equal on earth to talk to or something like that. And that's the same type of idea here.

It's that type of an arrogance in the man's prayer. And here's the point. As I walk with Jesus and others on the Jesus way, he warns me against all talking to him, which flows from self-trust, self-righteousness, self-congratulation, and contempt of others.

[23 : 31] And he speaks it not to the Pharisees, not to the Sadducees, not to the politicians, not to Pilate, not to Rome.

He speaks it to his disciples. It's something that we who gather here in his name need to take deeply to heart, deeply to heart. That's very easy for us to start to trust in ourselves, trust in our own righteousness, trust, and congratulate ourselves in our prayers, and treat others with contempt.

Now, some of us have a hard time sort of thinking that this could actually be about us. I mean, basically, one of the things that the Bible is telling us here is that every one of us struggle with self-righteousness.

You know, if you went to an AA meeting, you'd begin, when you speak to yourself, you'd say, Hi, I'm George. I'm an alcoholic. In a sense, what Jesus is telling us is that we need to realize that we almost have to come into a church and say, Hi, Jesus.

I'm self-righteous. I'm self-righteous. And I'm trusting in a power higher than myself to deal with my self-righteousness addiction, my self-trust addiction, my self-congratulation addiction, and my contempt of others addiction.

[25 : 30] You know why? Well, because we're not like those charismatics who always just talk about Holy Spirit type of stuff. Good grief. All they do is crazy things. You know, they bark like dogs and run around like crazy.

We're not like those Anglo-Catholics. All they do is this all the time and this all the time and kneel and bow and scrape and wear frilly, lacy clothes, and we're not like those. No, we never would think and talk like this.

That would never be part of our self-awareness. It would never be that any charismatic would look down their nose at reformed types. independence. Or Anglo-Catholics. It would never be the case that some Anglo-Catholic would look down their nose at evangelicals or charismatic.

It would never be the case that some brethren type or Baptist type would look down their nose at Anglicans. It would never be the case that an Anglican would look down their nose at a brethren or a Baptist.

It would never be a case that any of us would ever do something like that. It would never be the case that some of us who vote conservative would look down our nose at those who vote liberal or NDP. and it's never the case that anybody who votes NDP would look down their nose at somebody who votes conservative.

[26 : 35] This is a completely and utterly irrelevant problem. Why does the Bible even talk about it? See, it's a human problem.

One of the things I try, I'm not very successful about it, you can pray for me, but one of the things I try to talk about when I talk with people in a Starbucks and they make accusations against the Christian faith, and I don't try to pretend that Christians haven't done really bad things, I don't try to pretend that I haven't done any bad things, but what I try to have them understand is that what they're talking about is a human problem.

And the question is, as a human problem, what does your religion or spirituality or ideology say about it, and what resources does it have to deal with it?

And so here, Jesus very frankly puts his finger on a human problem. Ford Nation in Toronto looks down their nose at the Toronto Star and people who live in the Annex.

And people in the Toronto Star and the Annex look down their nose on Ford Nation. It is a human problem, and Jesus identifies it.

[28 : 05] We struggle. Actually, sorry, we don't struggle. That's the problem. A lot of us don't struggle with self-righteousness at all. Don't struggle with contempt of others at all.

We're like the unrighteous judge. We spend our whole day feeling self-righteous, self-satisfied, self-congratulatory, look down our nose on others, and then we have a great eight hours sleep and wake again to do it with no self-knowledge, even in the least.

In the Bible, Jesus is trying to bring to us a human problem, a human problem that causes division and keeps us separate from God.

And so Jesus warns us that as we walk with him and others in his way, he warns me against all talking to him, which flows from self-trust, self-righteousness, self-congratulation, and contempt of others.

As I've said to you before, I don't know who first said it. It wasn't my line. We can't look up to God if we're looking down our nose at other people. It's physically impossible.

[29 : 14] And this text is just encouraging us to, in a sense, partly what this text is teaching us to do, I'm going to return to it in about 10 minutes, but partly what this text is just trying to teach us is just to adore.

I mean, I was born a lot longer ago than maybe most of you here, not all of you, but, you know, I haven't lived. I have a beginning. I have an end.

God is just big. Like, you know, sometimes when I'm flying across the continent or something like that, and I just think to myself, it's as if God just puts into my thought a little bit for a moment, this planet is so big, and God has to be bigger than the planet to make the planet.

This galaxy, this universe, it is so big. God has to be so big to form the galaxies and the stars and the universe and the planets and all of these people.

God just has to be so big and so great why am I thinking that I'm somehow his equal? Why am I looking down my nose at other people when God asks me to look up to the great God, the planet shaping, planet spinning, galaxy holding, universe forming God, and this God asks little me to speak to him honestly, as a creature, as one who is self-righteous, self-satisfied, self-trusting, and shows contempt to others, and still he asks me to speak to him honestly, and he invites you to speak to him honestly.

[31 : 04] This is the real world, not a false and an imaginary and religious and spiritual world, but it is the real world.

Now some of you might say, okay George, but doesn't Jesus contradict himself? You know, okay, you're telling me that it's all about, it's about not being, you know, about being humble and not being like a black hole and thinking about yourself and looking at the bigness of God, but George, you have nine kids and you have really good kids, but kids are not humble.

They're not. Kids do not spend all of their time thinking about others. I want, I want, I want, and they throw little temper tantrums when they don't get what they want.

I didn't intentionally pinch a child, have somebody pinch a child at that moment, just so you know. I'm not that well organized. You know, kids aren't particularly humble.

Kids aren't particularly, well, you know, kids throw temper tantrums. Adults throw temper tantrums on the inside. Kids say, why bother with it being on the inside when I can go all out to get that thing that I want?

[32 : 27] You know, kids are all about wanting at least the same amount, if not more. Like, once kids have siblings, he has more space. He has more cake.

He has more cookies. She has more time with you. She has, he has, she has. That's what kids are like. So, George, isn't Jesus being a little bit contradictory?

Well, let's look. Verses 15 to 17. Now, they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when, that's to bless them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked the, the parents.

Um, the, the original language here is that it's very, very young children. You're talking about kids who are like 10 months old and you're talking about 14 month old little toddlers who walk like Frankenstein.

Okay. It's the, the language is it's identifying very, very young children. So the disciples aren't rebuking the children, they're rebuking the parents. And, uh, and then Jesus says, verse 16, but Jesus called them to him saying, let the children come to me and do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

[33 : 37] Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. Um, listen again, let the children come to me and do not hinder them for to such belong the kingdom of God.

Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. Now I'm going to explain this point in a moment, but I want to sort of take a bit of a time out in the sermon and this is volunteer Sunday and I'm not really good at raw, raw, uh, let's, uh, tackle these mountains.

Uh, we're having everybody sign up. Like I'm, I'm just not very good at it. Some of you have read my blog. Um, you know, I, I think a lot of churches like pastors who are like football coaches who give inspiring speeches and try to get you pumped up and give you five great points for success and six reasons why you should do something.

You read my blog on Volunteer Sunday and, and it's like an exercise in, in whether the word volunteer is in the Bible or not and, um, it doesn't maybe necessarily inspire you although hopefully, well, I'm trying to make an important point because the word volunteer isn't in the Bible and, um, but, but here's the thing.

Uh, Jesus here is giving us a very, very specific challenge. We're taking a bit of a break, time out from prayer. He's giving us a very specific challenge is that Jesus loves children and one of the things I can ask you to pray for is just pray that God will send more children to the church.

[35 : 04] Like, please make that part of your, of your daily prayer that God will send children to the church that he will find that, that God will change us in some ways so that we can minister to children, that we can love children, that we can encourage children, that we can bless children, that we can share the gospel with children, that we can disciple children.

Pray that God will use us to bless children by bringing them to Jesus. Just pray for that and ask yourself whether God is calling you to be involved in some way in this ministry and I don't just mean our established ministries, I don't just mean getting involved with Sunday school or the nursery or with the youth group but I'm also talking about there's this huge potential out there and you know, you know, maybe what God is calling us to do, maybe God is calling one of you to say, you know what, we can do six vacation Bible schools this summer, can't we?

We can do three downtown and we can do three in different neighborhoods and surely that we can find some way to do that and maybe if not six, maybe it's seven, maybe it's four, maybe it's some after type of school program, I don't know what it is but the fact of the matter is that Jesus tells us that he loves children and his people should love children and I just want to really encourage you not just to think about whether God is calling you to be involved in reaching out to children but just, this is a Sunday where we just want to encourage people that Jesus walked, we enter one by one but we walk it with others and that means that all of us have some role to play in walking with each other, to encourage each other, to equip each other, to walk with each other and I just want to encourage you to just pray to God, talk to different people and if none of the ministries sort of scratch, you don't want to sort of, they don't just fit in and maybe God is calling you to help us to walk into some new area of ministry and you should talk to Amy, you should talk to me,

I just want to encourage you to pray, to pray about how you can be involved and specifically on a Sunday like this, how we can be involved in heeding the words of Jesus of let the little children come to me.

Okay, back to the sermon. Sorry. I, okay, here's the point and then I'm going to start to unpack it. As I walk with Jesus and others on the Jesus way, he wants me to receive his way like a child.

[37 : 25] As I walk with Jesus and others on the Jesus way, he wants me to receive his way like a child. Now this text has caused lots of mischief amongst Christians.

Lots and lots of mischief. I, when I was still part of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa, you would not believe how many workshops and other things that I went to and I'm not going to just pick on them. I've been at other types of clergy things and other things where people encourage us to get in touch with their inner child, to be more childlike, to learn how to play.

I was a couple of years ago at a major Christian graduate institution. I went for a, for some continuing ed and there were a variety of speakers and I came in after lunch for the speaker and, and as I'm coming in, there's somebody at the door handing out paper and crayons for the workout.

And I said, why are you handing out paper and crayons? She said, well, it's going to be really necessary. She's talking about being more childlike. And I told the person, I'm sorry, I was, this is a very rude moment. I was being very un-Canadian and I said that one of the rules I have now developed in my life is I never go to a talk by a professor where I'm going to need a crayon.

And so I went for a walk instead because I didn't want to sit there and try to play with crayons through a presentation. The text is not telling us to get in touch with our inner child, to try to be like children.

[38 : 49] What is that? Anyway, no, I was going to say something that Johnny Depp said that that would have been a bit rude so I won't say it. You have to be careful when you preach the things that pop into my head you would not believe.

Sometimes I get in trouble with it afterwards. Here's the thing a little bit about, so first of all, if Jesus only said this about prayer, if that's the only thing Jesus said, we'd be sort of stuck with it.

But you notice that this is a text that talks about a range of things. And so from the very, very first story of the woman and the unjust judge, we can see that what God gives us is justice.

And we know that children aren't always really concerned about justice. In some ways, children can be like the unjust judge in that they don't necessarily respect their parents, respect their brother and sister, or fear God, and they can still have a perfectly fine night's sleep.

And so the text is telling us that we have to be concerned with justice and fairness. And the earlier text is telling us we have to be concerned with humility and understanding that we're sinners and that we're at fault. So that the text, whatever it means about being like a child, it's going to be balanced by these other teachings of Jesus on prayer.

[39 : 56] But here's a way to enter into it at its heart. When I was in Eganville, it was a very unusual experience for me. I was a child, am a child of immigrants who came from another country, obviously.

I was born here about a year after they immigrated to Canada. I grew up in Montreal. I lived in Ottawa. In a sense, I don't have a home. Like really, for me, home is where Louise is.

When I'm with Louise, I'm home. When I'm with Louise and my kids, I'm home. It could be any city in the world. I don't have roots. But there were people in Eganville, there was this one man, his name was Jimmy, and one of his great sorrows was that he was the fifth generation to live and work on that farm, and he had not been able to have children.

And there were many people in Eganville who were five or six generations in the same spot. But here's the thing.

How would the sixth generation on that same spot and how would I, as a child, learn about Canada? Same way.

[41 : 14] It doesn't matter that one's five generations on the land and I'm just a brand new immigrant. The same way. Children just accept their country. They just accept that there's certain ways that you dress.

They just accept it. It's like it's even deeper than trust. It's just, that's just the way it is. Now, the text isn't telling us that we shouldn't be concerned with justice.

The first text tells us that we should be concerned with justice. This is talking about something which is far simpler. That a child, the children here in this church who are being brought up in Canada, it doesn't matter where their parents were from, they come up in this country and they learn the language of the country.

They learn the way the country works. That's just the way it is. Their parents are just their parents. And so what this is asking us to do at a very, very deep level is to accept the Jesus way, to accept his kingdom, to accept its language, to accept its purposes, to accept its priorities, to accept its warnings, to accept its exhortation, to accept what we should long for, to accept what we should fear, that at a very, very deep level, it doesn't mean we don't use our brains and everything, but at a very, very, very deep level that our predilection, that our basic preference is just to accept that God knows.

Just to accept. Because you'll notice in the text, go back and look at it, verse 16, let the little children come to meet and do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

[42 : 56] It's a communal image. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God, like a child shall not enter it. So that's what we can pray for.

That at a deep level, it doesn't mean we don't try to meditate upon Scripture and go into the depths of Scripture and try to understand how the Scripture is dealing with our heart, but at a very, very, very fundamental level, we just accept it.

We accept Jesus and his way at a deep level and that's what we can cry out for to God in terms of our prayer. And that leads me to my concluding point.

One of the things that's regularly mocked in our culture is the idea of the sinner's prayer. And some of you, if you're not from an evangelical background, you don't even know what the sinner's prayer is.

It's often mocked that there are, in many, many wide ranges of Christianity, it's mocked within evangelicalism. This idea that there's a prayer that can change your life, that you can, that there's a time in your life for some people where they have to come to God and they have to say a prayer about accepting Jesus into their lives and asking.

[44 : 07] And it's sort of mocked and the whole idea of altar calls which is just a form of an invitation or a minister asking for people to invite Jesus into their lives and to pray a particular prayer.

And it's disbelieved and it's mocked by many, many, many people who call themselves Christians and many, many people outside of the Christian faith. It's an idea that people make fun of. Some of you who have been here before know that I issue invitations.

I'm going to issue an invitation today and I invite people to say a prayer to ask Jesus to come into their lives. So why do I do that? I'm a Canadian.

I'm sensitive of cultural pressure. You know why I do it? I do it because Jesus tells me to. That's why I do it. Because I want to be like a child.

Look at verses 13 and 14. Remember, he's talking about the tax collector. Verse 13. But the tax collector standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[45 : 14] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

I know that for myself I actually walked an aisle and went forward to give my life to Christ and I have to confess that one of the things that kept me from doing that for many months was that I did not want to humble myself in front of a congregation.

I did not. I'm not proud about that. There's all sorts of things in this life that we do not do because we compare ourselves to others and wonder what they would think.

But here's the amazing thing. This is actually, this guy, all he prays is these in English, God, be merciful to me, the sinner.

Seven words in English. The word which is translated as merciful here is actually a unique way in the original language. It's a unique word. It's only found in one other place in the Bible which is Hebrews 2, verse 17.

[46 : 24] And most of us when we think of mercy we think of give me a break. Like if I owe you a hundred bucks I don't have it with me today. You know, in a sense I'm saying give me some mercy, give me some grace, give me a break, cut me some slack, give me an extra few days and I'll get it to you.

And that's what we tend to think of mercy that person cutting us some slack, being patient and being kind. But here the original word is not actually what, it's only here in two verses, this in Hebrews 2, 17.

And what it's actually saying is it's actually asking to be covered by the atoning, the atonement. It's asking to be covered by a sacrifice that God makes to make us right with him.

It's in fact, in the Greek word, it's the Greek word for the Hebrew word for atonement. You've heard of Yom Kippur, the day of atonement?

The Hebrew word, because this is from Psalm 51, is Kippur, atonement. Have your atonement be on me.

[47 : 27] Have your covering of my sins be on me. It's pointing to Jesus and what he's going to do on the cross. And the man, he prays from his heart.

It emerges from his heart. He understands his separation from God and his need. And he cries out from his heart. And it begins in his heart and he uses words.

And Jesus says, this man goes home justified. And the same word that is translated there as justified is translated in many places in the Bible as righteous. It means redeemed. It means forgiven.

It means made right with God. And Jesus says, this man prays this prayer and goes home right with God. And so why do I give an invitation?

Because Jesus teaches us this. Here, Andrew, if you could put up the final point. Jesus wants me to enter his way and walk his way, praying from my heart, God, be merciful to me.

[48 : 30] A sinner. Jesus wants me to enter his way and walk his way, praying from my heart, God, be merciful to me, the sinner.

We enter the Jesus way with such a prayer. and we walk the Jesus way, always asking to be covered by what Jesus did for us on the cross.

You know, I ask, in a sense, my marriage to Louise begins by me telling her I love her and will she marry me? And in a sense, every day for the rest of my life, in a sense, I'm to renew my vows by telling her that I love her.

And every day of the Christian walk is to remember that we need to be covered by the blood of Jesus, by what he did for us on the cross. That's to grip us. It's to be what we understand as the central thing that makes us right with God.

It's not how many good works, we don't have to do a whole pile of good works and then finally Jesus accepts us. We don't have to do a whole pile of good works and get our lives in a particular type of order or a particular type of obedience and then Jesus applies what he's done on the cross for us.

[49 : 39] Nothing in my hands I bring simply to the cross I cling. We only enter the Christian way and live the Christian way by grace and by what Jesus does for us on the cross.

And, you know, here's the thing. You know, some people, they're raised by Christians and there's never a time in their lives when they haven't trusted in Jesus and that's really good.

But if there's never been a time in your life that you haven't trusted Jesus, then it's the easiest thing in the world to say, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. You might not be able, you might not have to walk down an aisle to say it, but it's an easy thing to say to Jesus, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

And some of us don't know the particular moment when we realize that we had to give ourselves to Jesus. Maybe it was in September, we would still have not wanted to do that and then somehow in May something changed and we realized that our heart had changed and we were now trusting Jesus as our Savior.

Then if that's described you, there's nothing, you just say to him, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I don't know when I said it first, you don't care about that, you just care that it comes from my heart.

[50 : 48] And if it comes from my heart, I can say it, God, be merciful to me, the sinner. But others of us, it would be like me, your pride is keeping you from saying such a prayer and the Holy Spirit's pressing upon you to say, God, be merciful to me, the sinner.

And if that's what you're going to pray today and I'm not going to, you just, you have your Bibles, you have it on the screen, I'm not going to try to, Jesus said this works if it's coming from your heart.

I'm not going to try to gild the rose. Just pray it from your heart and enter the Jesus way and walk it with Jesus and others. Please stand.

Father, you know how much we're influenced by the people around us. You know, Father, how much that keeps us from doing things? I guess, Father, sometimes that's a good thing.

But you know, Father, there's lots of times that our obedience to you is circumscribed and hindered by what others will think. Father, make us like a child who just accepts your way and will walk in your way and trust your words.

[52 : 18] Father, we want to make it complicated. We want to make it like we have to get our act together by ourselves or do exemplary service to you before you will accept us as your child.

But Father, Jesus himself tells us to cry out to you from our heart, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Father, that's what we want to do. Help us, Father, to do that in such a way that we enter the Jesus way and help us to say that every day as we walk the Jesus way.

Father, we come to you. We are self-righteous, self-congratulatory. We treat others with contempt. We are sinners. I acknowledge and confess that before you.

May the blood of Jesus and what he did for me on the cross, may that cover me. Only that, Father, will make me right with you. Jesus, I am your child by adoption and grace.

Thank you for what your son did for me on the cross. Thank you that you want me to talk to you again and again and again and again. All this we ask and thank in the name of Jesus, your son and our savior.

[53 : 19] Amen.