

How to Pray

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Date: 22 December 2013

[0:00] Luke 18 verse 9 through 14! And he, the Lord Jesus, spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves, that! they were righteous and despised others. Two men went up into the temple to pray, the! one a Pharisee and the other a publican.

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. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. 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. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.

For everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Two prayers. Two people praying. Prayer is something really precious and wonderful and something our Lord commands. And he tells us about prayer. He teaches us a prayer here in Luke 18. And what a contrast it is of the publican and the Pharisee. We need to pray, brothers and sisters, we need to pray. Someone has said, what the church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organisations or more novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use, men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. Men whom the Holy Ghost can use, men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. Let's have a look at the prayers prayed here in Luke 18 and see what we can learn from the prayer of the publican. In other words, the tax collector, the one that was looked down upon as the sinner, as they had a reputation of being ruthless and selfish kind of people. He was a publican. And we see firstly, it was humble prayer. The prayer was humble. The man prayed humbly when he prayed. He did not lift up his eyes to heaven, but yet his prayer reached heaven. He did not look up to heaven, yet his prayers reached heaven.

His prayer was answered. How we need people of God to humble ourselves. Humility. There's something lacking, isn't it? Repentance. It's time to have that repentant and broken heart, a contrite spirit. As we read in Psalm 34, verse 18. Psalm 34, verse 18. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saith of such as be of a contrite spirit. The Lord is nigh. He's near to them. Those that are of a broken heart, those that are of a contrite spirit, He saves. So God is near to those, those ones, those ones who are contrite, who turn from sin.

What a contrast it was when the Pharisee was praying with himself, and he was bragging on about the things that he had done. It was all about him. Contrasting prayers. We read further in Psalm 51, verse 17, about humble prayer, that humble spirit. It says, Psalm 51, and this one is of course the one where David was repenting of his sin, of his falling into gross sin. And Psalm 51, verse 17, David prayed, The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. O God, thou wilt not despise.

[4:23] David was broken when he prayed, when he praised in Psalm 51, yet he knew that God received his prayer.

In Isaiah 57, verse 15, we see who the Lord comes to when prayer is offered.

Isaiah 57, verse 15, the Lord Almighty is speaking. It says, For thus saith the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy. I dwell in the High and Holy Place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.

A contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. This one, the one speaking, is the one whose name is Holy. Of course we know the Lord Jesus is called the Holy One.

And this Holy One, whose name is Holy, he inhabits eternity, yet he chooses to come and dwell with him also, that is of a contrite and humble spirit. So when we're feeling contrite, when we are contrite, when we are humbled before God, then God can come to us and revive us and touch us. The Holy One seeks humble ones. The Holy One seeks humble ones.

[6:05] Are you willing to be humbled? The Lord says in Isaiah 66, verse 2, Verse 2, But to this man will I look, even to him that is of a pure, poor and of a contrite spirit, that trembleth at my word.

To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

There's humility there, when someone will come and tremble at the truths of scripture.

When someone comes with that truly poor and contrite spirit, realising the poorness, the poverty of our estate, and realising that our total dependence upon the Lord our God.

We need to have that spirit of humility, that we can have the spirit of holiness. So that we can have his grace, and his love, and his open ear to our prayer.

Prayer is the great privilege for us. And it's not something we need to have great flowering words or man's kind of phrases, but it's a simple humility that we can come and cast ourselves at his feet.

[7:18] And we see the simple prayer of this man who prayed. You know, the man who prayed when he really hadn't got a lot to say, had he?

Whereas the Pharisee prayed and said, I thank thee, I'm not as other men as this one here and that one there, and especially not that one over there. And I've done this and I've done that and I'm so good.

And you know, this is the kind of attitude of the Pharisee. Yet what was the attitude of the publican? God be merciful to me, a sinner.

Simple words. A simple prayer. A humble prayer. And that was the prayer that our Lord commended. We can learn much from that, can't we?

I know sometimes there's such simple prayers as, Lord save me! Where we see, was it Peter as he was falling into the, sinking into the waters.

[8:15] Just simple prayers. And your prayer might be simple. You might not be a man or a woman of many words. Yet you can have a prayer that reaches heaven. When it's a humble prayer.

There was a Christian man called Ivan, who endured all the horrors of a Soviet prison camp. One day he is praying with his eyes closed, when a fellow prisoner notices him and says with ridicule, prayers won't help you get out of here any faster.

And opening his eyes, Ivan answered, I do not pray to get out of prison, but to do the will of God. To do the will of God. That's a simple prayer, isn't it?

A prayer that is certainly one that would please God. That we pray to please him. That we pray to do his will. And in prayer, we're really just servants awaiting the Master's instructions, aren't we? We're really just subjects of our great and glorious King. We're really just children dependent upon our Heavenly Father. And prayer is humility in action.

[9:23] Prayer is surrender. Surrender to the will of God. And our cooperation with that will. It's like someone who compared it, how when you have a boat and you throw out a boat hook to catch hold of the shore.

You throw out something to catch hold of the shore. And then you pull. Do you pull the shore closer to you? Or do you pull yourself closer to the shore? And prayer is not pulling God to your will.

But it's really aligning your will with His will. Prayer is aligning ourselves as Ivan prayed. Not to get out of prison, but to do the will of God.

It's a surrender to His will. That's humble prayer. Humble prayer. Secondly, we see it is heart prayer. Heartfelt prayer. Prayer from the heart.

The publican's prayer came from his heart. It was short and simple. Heaven reaching prayer is prayer from a broken and contrite heart. The publican's heart was very much at work in the prayer that he prayed.

[10:33] He did not perform. He did not claim anything for himself. The only claim he made for himself was that he was a sinner. A sinner.

He did not concern himself with other men's sins. His only eyes were to his own sins. That was where he saw his unworthy estate. He saw how unworthy was his state.

He saw how unworthy was his condition. And you know, sometimes when we go about our lives, and I was talking with another brother of late, and how there's a whole lot of condemnation about people.

And I was just talking with someone earlier today of such a thing. Much condemnation heaped upon them. And yet, all we can really do is examine ourselves, isn't it?

As the word says. Examine yourself. Examine yourself. Don't be as the Pharisee and examine others. Of course, there's needful church discipline when it's called for, which can be unpleasant. [11:34] But it's meted out with grace. It's meted out with love. It's meted out with the object of restoration. It's meted out with that spirit of the men who do so, that they are watching their own selves in the process, that they're very conscious of their own failings.

Heartfelt prayer. Heart prayer. How is our heart with God? Do we have that zeal for the things of God? That zeal to please Him?

Preacher Ryle said this, zeal is a burning desire to please God. To do His will. To advance His glory in the world in every possible way.

A zealous man is preeminently a man of one thing. He is more than earnest, hearty, uncompromising, wholehearted and fervent in spirit.

He sees only one thing. Cares about one thing. Lives for one thing. Swallowed up in one thing. And that one thing is to please God.

[12:43] Whether he lives or dies, has health or has sickness. Whether he is rich or poor, pleases people or gives offence. Whether he is thought wise or foolish, gets the blame or the praise.

Whether he receives honour or is given shame. He burns for one thing. And that one thing is to please God. Such a one will always find a sphere for his zeal.

If he cannot preach, he will work and give money. He will cry and sigh and pray. If he cannot fight in the valley with Joshua, he will hold up the hands of Moses until the battle is won.

Zeal. Zeal. A burning desire to do the will of God. We see in the simple prayer of the publican that it was prayer from the heart.

It was prayer with zeal. It was prayer with love. It was prayer that was filled with a passion to do the will of God. To find God's will. To seek the face of God.

[13:43] Another preacher of old, Booth, you might know that name. Once had an audience with the King of England, King Edward VII.

And his majesty was there highly commending this man for all the good works that he was doing. And his zeal and such things. And Booth said just this.

He said, your majesty, some men's passion is for art. Some men's passion is for fame. My passion is for souls. My passion is for souls.

He had a passion. He was zealous. He had a fire. He had a zeal. And he was a zeal. Just as this publican had.

There was something deep within. That was crying out. And there was deep feelings there. That the publican had as he prayed. He prayed from his heart. I heard a good quote lately.

[14:41] It says, it's easier to cool down a fanatic than to warm up a corpse. It's a good quote, isn't it? It's easier to cool down a fanatic than to warm up a corpse.

You know, I'd rather see some people who've got a bit of enthusiasm and might not be quite in alignment with necessarily everything that I believe.

Yet they've got some enthusiasm. There's a bit of fire in their belly. There's a bit of spark in them.

There's something. There's a bit of get up and go in them. Rather than someone who's a corpse.

Who's just about fit for the box. You know, we need to have some enthusiasm and passion and fire and that feeling.

And that's what the publican had as he was beating his chest and saying, God, be merciful to me, the sinner. God, be merciful to me.

[15:41] You know, you could sense the passion. You could sense the emotion, the feeling of his prayer. He cried out for God's mercy. And the sense here is of atonement.

This sense of God being merciful to me. And it's got the sense of the atonement there. Because the place of mercy, the channel of God's mercy is the atonement.

It is the blood sacrifice of our Lord God. In the mercy seat, we see the atoning blood shed. And we see the blood shed on that hill Calvary.

That place of the skull where our Lord was crucified. There we see mercy. There we receive mercy. And our only hope is that his mercy will be extended.

Not in any work of man. Not in any doing of our own. Just as the thief on the cross. What could the thief claim? This thief on the cross in his dying breaths.

[16:43] He could claim no work. He could claim no religious act. He could claim no fasting or tithing or worthiness of his own. There was no works. There was no religious credit to this man.

He was considered a thief, a transgressor. He was being dealt his just punishment for his wrongdoing. There was nothing on his CV that he could lay claim to, as it were, to gain any merit or credit in those dying breaths.

He cried, Lord Jesus, remember me. That was all he could scarcely cry out. And there was mercy there.

Mercy was there at Calvary. And it's still there today. It's still there today. Even this very moment. The mercy of God is still something we can call out for. And we see this dying thief on the cross. His unworthiness was plain for all to see. Here he was. What a spectacle. Sin. Punishment. Due punishment. This thief on the cross. Dying a gruesome death.

[17:56] In shame and disgrace. As a condemned criminal. But God heard the heart cry. God heard the heart cry of this thief on the cross. And the Lord Jesus says, assuredly, verily, you shall be with me today in paradise.

What a blessing to know that mercy can be received even from such a simple prayer. And we need likewise to turn in faith to God. In humble faith.

In heart faith. Coming to him. To receive that mercy extended still. Extended to mankind at the cross. There we see our sin paid. We see our guilt.

Our substitute. Our burden. Our fault. And our due condemnation and penalty. Extended in full. In the person of our Saviour. In the very body. On the tree. Our sin was nailed and paid for. Fully. One hundred percent. You know, thank God for that.

[18:59] I know I was talking with someone this morning. And they were saying that a friend of theirs was quite prone to doing the wrong thing. And, you know, they would get some fuel and then speed off without paying for it.

And as they were speeding off from the petrol station, they were saying, Hail Mary. Hail Mary. Hail Mary. Hail Mary. And they thought that that was going to cover it for them. They thought that they were going to be okay.

Because they said these words that some ill-informed person had recommended for them to say. And yet, friends, mercy is not found in words of rote or such ritual, but in words of faith.

In a heart truly turning to God. And our sin was there in the person of the Saviour. Nailed there. Nailed there.

Paid for there. Crucified there. Your sin and mine if you trust Him. And our only plea is that He would extend His mercy. It's a heart prayer.

[20:09] So we've seen it is a humble prayer that God hears. A humble prayer. God be merciful to me, a sinner. Humble prayer.

A heart prayer. A prayer with feeling. With love. With repentance. With desire. With zeal. And thirdly, it is a heard prayer.

A heard prayer. A heard prayer. Because some prayers don't go any higher than the ceiling. God does not hear some prayers. We'll talk about that.

Some prayers will not be heard. They're pretty much pointless, you could say. The Lord Jesus says in verse 14, I tell you, this man, the publican.

This man, the man who looks like he's a sinner. This man who looks and appears to have that reputation of unworthiness, of sinfulness. This man went down to his house justified rather than the other.

[21:17] For everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased, cast down, humbled. And he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

The prayer that was heard was from the publican. He did not try. He trusted. He did not brag. He bowed.

His prayer was not about what a man can do, but about what God can do. That's the difference. That's the difference, people.

Thank God for that. Otherwise, a lot of us would have any hope at all. Would we? Well, I know that's true for me.

God heard his prayer. God heard his prayer. But did he hear the other man's prayer? You know, Psalm 66 verse 18, it says, If I regard iniquity or sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

[22:27] It's saying if sin has its lodging place in those recesses of our heart, if there's corruption and foulness there, undealt with, the Lord will not hear that prayer.

It makes us consider such a thing, doesn't it? Are we cherishing, hiding, holding sin within and not coming truly unto him that he'd deal with our heart?

Let go of your sin. Let go of your sin. Let go of your sin. Don't be like the Pharisee. As much as there was much, humanly speaking, that he could claim merit for, there was much that he could claim some score for, some kind of claim to, as far as the world would reckon it.

He was an upstanding citizen. He was the one that would parade up and down and people would call him Rabbi and, you know, want to be one of his mates.

And he would be such a one, I'm just abliving a bit here, but he would be such a one that, you know, he was in the who's who. He was, you know, one of the people that was considered as of high regard of the nation, you could imagine, for all of his good works.

[23:52] Yet, let's not make the mistake that the Pharisee made. Coming to God like we can make a show of things, but it was all a mockery, a pretense, a sham, a make believe.

It was all a lie. The Pharisee. How about your faith today? Is it faith that's real, that's life changing? Is it real enough to alter your way of living? The man who claims these religious rituals and righteousness of himself, that prays within himself, he was just kidding himself.

He was kidding himself. He was praying to himself. The Lord Jesus says, one went home justified, declared righteous. One of these two, only one went home justified, made righteous, declared righteous.

Friends today, we need God. We need him. We need that dependence upon him. We need that sense of his convicting power. We need that sense of the conviction of sin, of bowing in humble adoration to him.

[25:08] Not claiming anything for ourselves, but letting go of ourselves and trusting him. We need his mercy. We need his mercy. You need his mercy today.

The one who ignotes himself will be humbled, it says. He will be brought down. He will be brought down off his throne, as it were.

Yet the repentant will be lifted up. It's wonderful, isn't it, how the scriptures tell us, the Lord Jesus says, to come as little children. Just simply.

Just simple faith. Sometimes we can complicate the whole thing and make it much more complicated than God makes it. It's simple faith to trust him.

The repentance will be lifted up. As we humble ourselves, he will lift us up. Now the right way to come to God.

[26:08] A preacher Spurgeon said this. The right way to come to God. To speak with him humbly, for we are sinful. Prayerfully, for we are full of need.

Believingly, for Jesus has offered a sacrifice and we are accepted in and through him. Humbly, prayerfully, believingly.

So we've seen two prayers. One that was heard. One man that was justified. We've seen it was prayer that was humble prayer.

Humble prayer. Not proud. Humble prayer. We've seen it was prayer that was heart prayer. Heart prayer. Not a prayer aside from the heart, where the heart was really far, far from God.

But a heart bowed down, acknowledging God. Dependent upon God. Contrite before God. A heart received by God.

[27:09] A heart changed and cleansed. Renewed by God. A heart prayer. A heart prayer. And we see it was a heard prayer. A prayer heard. A prayer heard. Don't you want your prayer heard?

When you pray, don't you want your prayer to be heard? That it doesn't go, get stopped at the ceiling. That it's just something that doesn't reach heaven. That it doesn't reach your Lord's ear. Then let it be a prayer such as this prayer. A prayer that does not regard iniquity in your heart. You'll turn from sin. And you'll rely on what God can do.

You won't claim anything for yourself. How we need to pray. The people of God need to pray. We need to pray. A preacher said this.

When we rely upon organisation, we get what organisation can do. When we rely upon education, we get what education can do.

[28:06] When we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do. And so on. Nor am I just supposed to undervalue any of these things in their proper place.

But when we rely upon God. When we rely upon prayer, we get what God can do. When we rely upon prayer, we get what God can do.

How we need that, people, don't we? We need to rely upon prayer and get what God can do. To ask God for his mercy. For his cleansing. For his grace. For his forgiveness.

For salvation. And for sanctification. For the saving grace that saves us. For the sanctifying grace that helps us live. As we please him.

And we do his will. We need to receive the work of Christ at Calvary for us. Just as the dying thief. You know.

[29:04] Some think there's degrees of reward. And in hell there's degrees of punishment. But really. What does all that matter really anyway?

It's grace. It's grace that makes that entrance into heaven. And just to be with him is reward enough, isn't it?

We don't need any crowns or any flutters. We're only inadequate servants, aren't we? At the best of times.

Well, I can speak for myself. That really. It's his grace. That's the only claim we can claim. And the thief on the cross had just as much grace.

As the most faithful Christian. And it's grace that makes the difference. Isn't it? Praise God for that. So let's fall at his feet.

[30:01] Plead for his grace. And friends, if you're not a Christian yet. Ask for his mercy. It's that simple. It's that simple prayer. Go on. Be merciful to me.

A sinner. And you can go home justified. Praise God. Let's pray.