

The Way to Mercy

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[0 : 00] Getting right with God. One memory that stood out to me was the time when I entered into a little country church at Moonser actually.

! It was an old chapel. Years ago Moonser and region had somewhat of an awakening. There was an in-gathering, a harvest of souls in years gone by.

Moonser and region were quite evidently touched by God. There was quite an in-gathering of souls. In this chapel it had a slogan in front of the altar of the church in old Gothic gilt-edged letters.

And this plaque had the words, Get right with God. And I don't know how long that had been in that little chapel there at Moonser, but I'd say it has been there for probably a hundred years.

Get right with God. And I thought, yeah, that's really, that's a critical thing, isn't it, really? That we should get right with God. Because we know without Him we're wrong with God, aren't we?

[1 : 12] We're out of Him. We're out of His fellowship. But He wants us to get right with God. To know Him. To trust Him. To believe. And we're going to take up this passage here in Luke chapter 18 that illustrates just this truth.

Getting right with God. How do we get right with God? And we see from verse 9 of Luke 18, It reads, And our Lord is speaking, And it says, And He 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.

[2 : 50] And he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Now, our Lord here wasn't really speaking so much about prayer per se, but about getting right with God.

About how to be justified by faith. The story shows us the good man lost and the bad man saved. This parable tells of the nature of righteousness and the attitude of the heart that pleases God.

Our Lord tells of the importance of humility, of sincerity, of that genuine relationship with God as our heavenly Father, to know him in that relationship.

So we see in verse 9, it starts here, and we'll just walk through the words of this parable, this illustration, this story, that our Lord used to illustrate spiritual truth.

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves. It's got a sense they had confidence in themselves. Now, there is self-confidence, which may not be a bad thing, but as far as spiritually wise, self-confidence or confidence in yourself, trusting in yourself, and not God, it's not a good thing.

[4 : 06] Isn't it? They trusted, it says, they trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.

Despised others. They trusted in themselves, not God, that they were righteous and despised others.

So, it was on the basis of their own worthiness and merit that they had this idea that it was their own worthiness and merit.

And some of the Pharisees, of course, we know our Lord repeatedly rebuked the Pharisees, the religious crowd, the religious establishment, the religious leaders, the established authority of religion of its day.

Because why? Because some of the Pharisees, they were full of themselves. full of themselves. So prideful and vain. They trusted in themselves and their own righteousness.

[5 : 14] They reckoned they were righteous. They looked down on everyone else. It's got the sense of, I understand how you could translate it, elaborating on the sense of the meaning of it, they utterly despised the rest of mankind.

Had that sense. Others, as in everybody else but themselves. They were righteous. Everybody else was despised. Now, we could all come to think for ourselves, how am I?

How is my life? Is my life acceptable to God? And would we dare to stand in the shoes of the Pharisees and boast and brag about this or that?

But the Lord knows our hearts. He knows us truly. And we can't trust in ourselves. When you think of the scam artists that are out there, you think you can't trust this email or that, or this message that you get on your phone even.

And it all sounds quite kosher, doesn't it? It sounds like it's genuine. Oh, your bank's calling you and you've got to put in your PIN number to the, whatever it be. And there's people out there that are con artists.

[6 : 30] But we can even con ourselves, can't we? We can trick ourselves. We can trust in ourselves. And we shouldn't even trust ourselves, really, as far as there's no, we can't have any confidence in ourselves that we're going to necessarily do right.

If we're trusting in ourselves, it's not right. We must place all of our trust in God, all of our trust in Him. And it tells us, as it reads on, verse 10, two men went up into the temple to pray.

They wanted to go to pray. The one, a Pharisee. The other, a publican. He was a tax collector. He was one who was like an outcast of society.

A publican. He was a tax collector. So he was one of the population who took this administrative role, taking taxes from everybody.

And people hated him for that. Let's see how they prayed. First, we see the prayer of the Pharisee. The Pharisee stood and he prayed. Thus, who did he pray to?

[7 : 41] With himself. His prayer was to himself. That was who he was praying to, effectively. So his prayer really got no higher than the roof. There he stood, tall and vain.

I give thanks to you, O God, that I am not like the rest of other men. The rest of men, they're grasping and crooked, adulterous, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I tithe on all I possess. I give thanks to you, God, that I am keeping the law, that I have been keeping this law all of my life.

And his prayer reveals this heart that's consumed with self-righteousness and a judgmental attitude towards everyone else, that he perceives others as less than him.

And he is just so vain and prideful and self-righteous. He wasn't really praying and thanking God, but he was only congratulating himself, big noting himself.

[8 : 51] Sure, he was good. He really thought he was a good man. And he was, by man's standards, or thinking, or by appearance, he looked good.

He looked the part. Everything was just right. He looked like he was just like an angel. Perfect. A good man. He was honest. He wasn't an extortioner, a thief, as many of the tax collectors were. He was honest, I guess, as far as it looked like he was honest. He was just. He was fair with others. He was virtuous. He wasn't an adulterer. He was temperate.

He fasted twice in every week. Moses had only appointed one fast per year. He was fasting way more than everybody else. He was giving.

Moses only instructed a tithing of the fruits of the earth and the increase of the cattle. This Pharisee gave tithes of all that he possessed. He was grateful.

[9 : 50] I thank thee. He had much to be thankful for, truly, for he had been saved from much outward sin. It looked like he was pretty good on the outside.

As our Lord talks about the Pharisees, they were like these sepulchers, these tombs. They were whitewashed tombs. They put the dead bones in these tombs, these graves that were painted white, and they looked all nice and bright on the outside, but inside they were full of dead men's bones.

So this Pharisee looked good. He looked good on the outside. He was a model citizen. People might have looked up to him as one of the kind of better ones.

We might think, what more could be expected of him? But the problem was, this man had no consciousness of his own sin. He wasn't conscious of his own sin. He wasn't conscious of his own unworthiness.

He did not ask for grace, and he received none. He didn't ask for God's grace, for God's kindness. He didn't ask for God's salvation. He thought he could save himself.

[10:59] He was very proud of his morality. He was boastful and smart, self-righteous. It wasn't God's righteousness, it was self-righteousness. And he was self-centered, he was selfish.

And he confessed his virtues rather than his sins. He says, I this, and I that. It's all about himself, isn't it? I thank thee. I am not as other men.

I fast. I give. I, I, I. So this Pharisee claimed all the credit. He was proud of his own righteousness. He was proud. Thought he had just everything right, and he sneered at everybody else. But the tax collector was humble before God.

He received mercy and grace. The Pharisee's focus on all the external actions and his comparisons with others blinded in to his own shortcomings.

[12:01] He talked of his own goodness and his own righteousness. Really, self-righteousness is pride. It's pride. And it is sin.

The point is, because he thought of himself as righteous, the Pharisee did not come to God as a needy sinner. He didn't think he needed God to save him. He didn't think he needed God to make him righteous.

He was righteous of his own self. Doing. Doing. Doing. The point is, he thought of himself as righteous, and he did not come to God.

So salvation, it's not for good people in the sense of the Pharisees, but for sinners. Christ says, I've come to seek and to save the lost, those that know I'm a sinner.

I need God. In effect, he was saying, all this goodness, oh God, I do on my own. I don't need God.

[12:59] I'm righteous. But God requires total purity. And we can never be worthy by our own actions.

Both the Pharisee and the publican were sinners. Sinners who needed to call on God to save. For mercy. So we've seen the prayer of the Pharisee.

Let's look now at the prayer of the publican, the sinner. And while the Pharisee prayed so proudly, the tax collector stood at a distance. He was like on the edge, on the right away from all the worship.

He just felt unworthy to even come. He felt unworthy to even approach. That he stood afar off. It says that he stood far off.

At a distance. And his eyes were looking down. But his heart was reaching up. He would not lift up so much as his eyes.

[14:03] He was ashamed of his sin. While he did not look up, his heart was reaching up to God. God was moving upon his heart.

Convicting him of his guilt and sin. So these tax collectors, they were disliked. They were hated. They were despised. Treated as outcasts. They were really kind of associating, what's the word, with the enemy.

Fraternalising with the enemy. They were working with the Romans, the evil Romans, to tax the people, to take their money. And many of these tax collectors, they were dishonest people. And they got wealthy by cheating and stealing from others. And this bad man, he had nothing to brag about. He knew that he was a bad man.

He knew that he was a sinner. And he was ashamed. As he saw his sin, he realised his sin. He realised his need of Christ. He realised his need of salvation.

[15:04] The shame of his sin. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

He stands afar off, though a Jew. He stands at a distance in the court of the Gentiles. He was conscious that his sins had distanced himself from God.

Praise God, though the publican stood afar off from God in conscious unworthiness. God did not stand far off from him. God was not far from him. Even though he was afar off, ashamed, God was very close to this man.

Because God knew his heart was in the right place. His sins had distanced him from God and he stood off in conscious unworthiness.

It's like to the scripture that tells us, the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart and saveth such as being of a contrite spirit. It says that God is close to those who have a broken heart and he saves them, those that have a contrite spirit.

[16:14] In other words, they are repensing, they have a contrition, they have a remorse, a turning from their sin. They have a broken up heart, a broken up spirit, that they are seeking God's forgiveness for their sin.

They're contrite. They're turning from sin. And he doesn't raise his eyes at all. He doesn't lift up his eyes to heaven. He's got this humble attitude of heart.

He beats his breast. Oh, I'm guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty. It says that he kept on doing this.

That's the sense of it as it reads of him smiting his breast, hitting his breast.

It's got the sense he kept on doing this. This was a, he was broken up over his sin and he was certainly taking it very to heart.

He says, Oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner. You could even put it, God be merciful to me, the sinner. I'm the sinner. There's the sense of it, the literal sense of it.

[17:22] He realised his sin was such that he was, I'm the sinner, I'm the sinner. I need a saviour.

He confesses himself to be a sinner. He recognises his sin, the horror of it, the consequence of it, the penalty of it, the sense of punishment.

Of course, the Bible says that the wages of sin is death. But thank God, the gift of God, the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This man doesn't claim any credit for any good that he has done, that he may have done. Maybe he did do lots of good things. He didn't brag on about it like the other man.

He just says, Honestly, I'm a sinner and I need a saviour. I'm a sinner. God be merciful. God be merciful. He sees his own sin and guilt. He realises he's guilty in the eyes of the Holy God.

And his prayer, like my wife, was short and sweet. His prayer was short and sweet.

[18:30] His prayer was short. It was just simple. Just seven words. Seven words. Wasn't it some long prayer? It was just seven words. God be merciful to me, a sinner.

That's a good prayer to pray, isn't it? It's a good prayer to pray. He saw his sinfulness. He saw his need of a saviour. His prayer, simple but profound. There's so much in that.

So much in that short prayer. Acknowledging his unworthiness and God's grace. God's grace. The spotlight was upon God's grace.

God's mercy. In this simple prayer, he says, in effect, he says, God show mercy through sacrifice to me, the sinner. As this God be merciful, it's got the sense of being propitiated.

It's got the sense there's a significance of a sacrifice here. That there is a way to get God's mercy and it is the sacrifice. It's literally saying, God be propitiated to me.

[19:32] In other words, a propitiation, it speaks of that substitution of that sacrifice that is in our place. That the provision of salvation is because the sacrifice has been made in our place.

That a sacrifice has been made. A sacrifice has been given. And that sacrifice is the means of his mercy. And so, you could see as much as it was pre the cross, the cross was yet to come, he sees the need of the atoning death of the saviour.

He sees, in effect, he sees the need of Christ at Calvary, the atoning death, that there had to be some propitiation made, some sacrifice made on his part, in his place.

And he calls out for God's mercy, the mercy of God. And he prays for God to be merciful. Now, it's interesting, as they went to the temple to pray, it was at the hour of sacrifice in the temple.

And so, the publican, unlike the Pharisee, was confessing his sin. He identified himself with the sacrifice. He's identifying himself with the sacrifice made for his sin.

[20:43] The Pharisee didn't think he needed a sacrifice. The Pharisee didn't think that he needed God's mercy. He didn't need saving because he was self-satisfied.

But that is not sufficient. And so, we see for the sinner here, he prayed, God, be satisfied with the value of your offering. Be satisfied with the value of your propitiation, of your sacrifice.

He had brought his sin offering as it was being offered upon the altar. He prayed, in effect, that God would show mercy through the substitute being offered.

So, that lamb that was slain, that was upon the altar, that that lamb was slain on his part. That lamb that was killed was really in place of himself.

It was the replacement for himself. That he was due death, the wages of sin, death. That the lamb that was killed was in his place. That it was in his substitute.

[21:49] He saw that only the value of the sacrifice could make full payment for the forgiveness of sin and satisfy divine justice. So, the sacrifice was an innocent animal. Have you ever seen those little lambs?

They're just so so cute. They had to die. A little lamb, a perfect lamb. And really, Christ is the lamb of God, it says.

He takes away the sin of the world. God's eyes saw the sacrifice and appreciated the value. God accepted the blood to save the sinner. The blood of the substitute shed in his place.

And it prefigured the great sacrifice of our Lord. That was yet to happen. So, God is merciful to the repentant sinner because he is satisfied with the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus at Calvary.

He is the perfect sacrifice. He is the one who can, we can get God's mercy because of Christ. Because Christ died for sinners. God exalts the humble and he grants them his grace and forgiveness.

[22 : 54] Sin can only be paid for us as we acknowledge that we have need forgiveness. We need mercy. We need a substitute dying in our place for our sin.

We can't be like the Pharisee. Huh, I don't need God to save me. I'm just fine and dandy. God be merciful. I need a saviour.

I need you to save me. I need the sacrifice. I need your mercy. It's such a contrast and we see the one who got forgiveness was the one who asked for it. He received it as he trusted the substitute dying in his place.

So compare as we just wrap this together, two prayers different. The Pharisee, the publican.

Repentance. He denied himself to be a sinner, the Pharisee. As far as repentance, as far as his call for forgiveness, as far as his turning his trust to him that can save himself, he denied himself to be a sinner.

[23 : 58] I'm not a sinner like that man. I don't do this or that. I do this and this. I don't do that like that man. He denied that he was a sinner.

This man came to God confessing, I'm a sinner. I'm a sinner. I need a saviour. Again, we see as far as humility goes, this man was proud, counted his merits of this or that, of fasting, of tithes, of considering himself better, holier than others.

Humility wasn't there but humility was here. This man, he was humble. He stood at a distance. He had a sense of unworthiness. He could not lift up his eyes to heaven.

He was ashamed of himself. He beat his chest as his heart was broken up. I'm a sinner. There was humility there and he repents.

He humbles himself and he receives and us and receives God's mercy. And we see acceptance by God. Our Lord says, I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.

[25 : 13] So the acceptance by God was not with this man but with this man. This man went home justified, saved, saved.

He got salvation. He was declared just, made righteous, forgiven, made upright, made in that right standing with God, made right from the inside out rather than the other.

God. This man goes away rejected by God for all his flowery praying. He went home lost. This man went home saved, forgiven, received by God, accepted by God.

He went home a changed man. He'd repented, he'd confessed, he'd trusted, he received forgiveness for his sin. in God's eyes he was justified. Justification.

God is a judge. Amen. And he is the perfect judge because he must punish sin. He's the perfect judge.

[26 : 23] judge. This man was justified. This man was not. Friends, God is a judge. We must have his judgment when he hits the the gavel, yeah.

We know really guilty. We're all guilty. But thank God this man, his guilt was forgiven.

His guilt was taken. His guilt was paid by the substitute. His guilt was pardoned. He received pardon. This man, he didn't get that.

He stayed guilty. And so God is judge. He declares who is just. He's the one who says who is just. And we can be justified by faith.

Justified by faith. made just, saved and delivered from the eternal penalty of sin and made righteous. For it reads on, for everyone that exalted himself shall be abased.

[27 : 31] That man will be humbled. He exalted himself. But this one who humbled himself, God will lift him up. He will exalt him. He will call him my son, my servant.

You're saved. This man missed out. And we think really it's literally everyone who is exalting himself shall be humbled. He who is humbling himself shall be exalted.

We should have that humbling. We should keep humble. Amen. Keep on the humble side. Keep humble. Because that's where true righteousness comes from. From that humility of heart. I'm not worthy.

God, forgive me. Forgive me. Forgive me again. But knowing that we're forgiven. We can walk in that newness of life, can't we? The unrighteous people who repent, who trust, they're more acceptable to God than the righteous people who make no confession of their sins.

They miss out. It's almost like when they come before a judge, don't they? They come before a judge. The one who's humble generally gets treated, well, at least they've got some shame about what they've done.

[28 : 42] This one, nothing right wrong with me. They're the ones that are guilty. They're the ones that are not going to receive forgiveness. They will be humbled in judgment, in the ultimate judgment day to come.

And so, to be justified means that God has nothing against you. Think that when you're declared just, he holds nothing against you.

You're free. You're declared his very loved one. You're declared his, his own.

And God has nothing against you. Justification is a gift of God. It's not earned nor received through anything we do to deserve it. But God can only justify by the sacrifice that Christ made for sin at Calvary.

So the publican was justified on the basis of the sacrifice of the Lamb offered upon the altar that pointed to the sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the whole world, as John the Baptist tells of him, the Lamb of God.

[29 : 56] And that was about to take place. So friends, let us cry out to him for pardon. Let's be on this side. Let's cry out, God pardon me, I trust you. Ask for his mercy through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So there's great lessons we can use to reflect on here, to guard against self-righteousness, to rather than be self-righteous, we should be humble, acknowledge our shortcomings, and realise we need his mercy.

God be merciful. cultivate genuine humility. So they've got a sense where they continue to be humble. He continued to be humble. He continued to recognise his dependence upon God.

And likewise too, our need of grace is, we continue to need grace. And grace teaches us how to live, to live righteously, soberly, godly, in this present world. Grace saves us and grace keeps on teaching us, keeps training us, changing us.

Humility. Here's grace. It opens the door to a deeper relationship with God. Then we see the power of authentic prayer, that our prayer should be characterised not by a condemnatory, an inflated view of ourselves, but by humility, to pray with humility.

[31 : 18] Authentic prayer, heartfelt prayer, honest prayer, sincere. And they see how God's grace is here, it's available. The both men could have got grace, grace, but grace wasn't on this side.

Grace wasn't in this man, because he didn't ask for it, he didn't act like he needed it as much as he did need it, because no one is beyond the reach of God's loving grace and mercy.

Which of the two are you like? The publican or the Pharisee? God wants us to acknowledge our sins, to cry out, mercy, mercy, save me, to acknowledge our need and to place our full trust in him, our full trust.

Don't think, oh, it's me saving myself. No. Entirely his mercy, entirely his, his worthiness, not mine. Our full trust in his forgiveness, to see that it's only through him, only through his saving, can we be saved, that we can obtain it, not through works of our own.

[32 : 30] And it's the sinner who recognises and confesses his sin, who's accepted, pardoned. You're free to go. Your fine has been paid.

Your penalty, your guilt has been pardoned. You've received a royal pardon, a royal pardon, because the king is also the judge.

The judge is also the king. He's a royal pardon. He's got the authority to pardon you. Amen. Think of that. It's mind blowing, really, isn't it, that thought. And so let us examine our hearts and be cultivating that genuine humility, that relationship with God.

May we approach you with sincerity, with humility, not with pride, to acknowledge our need of him, of grace. forgiveness. And it's that humble and contrite heart that gets the justification, that gets the forgiveness, that gets the pardon.

So let's strive to be like the man who was the sinner, striving for God's mercy and grace to prevail, not exalting ourselves or thinking ourselves better, trusting our own works, but realising we're a sinner, we need a saviour, we have to have his pardon.

[33 : 48] And salvation is the pardon of God, it's freely given, it's a gift, it's granted. And all the good works in this world without faith are empty.

They're like the good deeds of the Pharisee. Actually, they've missed the point. There's no pardon for that man.

So it's not how good we are, the only way of salvation is Christ. Christ. It's only his goodness, it's only his mercy, it's only his working that can affect salvation and minister salvation in our living. Only the mercy of God, received by faith. A person can be outwardly upright, yet be lost. That would be a grave mistake, a great mistake, would it not?

That our basis of salvation would be ourselves. It's not going to cut it. It's not going to work. Rather, be honest with God.

[34 : 57] Say, God, be merciful. I'm a sinner and I need you. I need you salvation. I need you to save me. God is rich in mercy, it tells us.

He's rich in mercy. His mercy is lavished. It's poured out richly, fully. So come to Christ in simple faith.

Trust him. Now, let us pray. Lord, we thank you that we can see such a great contrast here. Help us, Lord, to see where we're at tonight.

Lord, to be less like the Pharisee and much more like the one who called on you for mercy.

Especially if we've yet to trust you for our salvation, Lord, that we would not trust ourselves for salvation but entirely trust you for our salvation.

Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.