

God be Merciful

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Date: 23 April 2020

[0 : 00] God be merciful.

And he, the Lord Jesus, spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others. Two men went 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.

[1 : 37] The subject tonight really is prayer. And I put to you the first point is humble prayer. The prayer that is heard is humble prayer.

It says of the publican, the tax collector, that he did not lift his eyes to heaven, but yet his prayer reached heaven. His prayer was answered.

Humble yourself. That's the message here. Humble yourself. Repent. It's time to repent. It says in Psalm 34, verse 18.

Psalm 34, verse 18. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. What it's telling us there is that God is near to those who are contrite, who turn from sin.

As Psalm 51, verse 17 puts it, the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

[2 : 46] This was David in his time of repenting. And then we see another similar scripture is Isaiah 57, verse 15. It says, the Lord is speaking. He says, For thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabited eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Again, humble prayer. Humble prayer is what is heard. The holy one seeks humble ones. Are you willing to be humbled? The Lord says in Isaiah 66, verse 2, But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

The Lord says, To this man will I look, the one who is poor and of a contrite spirit. Sense his holiness today, his grace, his love.

Prayer is our great privilege. We cast ourselves at his feet. We give ourselves in commitment and love. There was a Christian man called Ivan, and this man, Ivan, endured all the horrors of the Soviet prison camp.

One day he was praying with his eyes closed when a fellow prisoner noticed him and said with ridicule, Prayers won't help you out. Prayers won't help you get out of here any faster.

[4 : 12] Opening his eyes, Ivan answers, I do not pray to get out of prison, but to do the will of God. When we pray, it's to do his will, it's to seek his face, it's to humble ourselves.

In prayer, we are really just his servants awaiting instructions. We are his subjects, his children, completely dependent upon our Father. So humble prayer is the prayer that is heard.

Secondly, we see that heart prayer is that which is heard. Heart prayer. The publican's prayer came from his heart. It was short and simple. Heaven reaching prayer is prayer from a broken and a contrite heart.

He did not perform. He did not claim anything of himself. His only claim was to be a sinner. He did not concern himself with other men's sins. His only eye was upon his own sins, his own unworthy state.

And he cried out for God's mercy. The sense here is of the atonement. Cover me. That atoning. That call for mercy. This word, it speaks of sacrifice, of the mercy seat, where the atoning blood was shed.

[5 : 18] This man's hope was the mercy extended by God. Not in any work of man. And it was like the thief on the cross. He didn't have anything to claim for credit to.

He didn't claim any work or any religious act. There was no fasting or tithing or worthiness of his own that the man on the cross could claim, this thief on the cross.

His only cry was for the mercy of God. And his unworthiness was plain to see this man on a cross justly rewarded for the due punishment for his crime.

This man was dying a gruesome death in shame and disgrace as a condemned criminal. And God heard his heart cry. Likewise, he can hear our heart cry.

Amen. He can hear our cry. We need likewise to turn in faith to God, to come to him, to ask for that mercy that is extended to mankind at the cross.

[6 : 18] There we see our sin paid for. Our guilt, our burden. We see our substitute, our very saviour. Our sin is there in the person of the saviour.

And so our only plea is that he extend his mercy towards us. That is heart prayer. We've seen there's the need for humble prayer. Secondly, for heart prayer.

And then we see that that kind of prayer is, thirdly, it's heard prayer. It's heard prayer. As the Lord says of this one who prayed, this publican, this tax collector, this unworthy one, who said, God, be merciful to me, the sinner.

It says, our Lord says of him, 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.

This tax collector, this publican, beating his breast and saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. He did not try.

[7 : 22] He trusted. He did not brag. He bowed. And God heard his prayer. His prayer. Likewise, we can take heart that we can have our prayer heard.

Our prayer will not be heard if we regard iniquity in our heart. As Psalm 66 verse 18 says, If I regard iniquity or sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

Let go of your sin. Let it go. Don't be like the Pharisee coming to make a show, a mockery, a pretense, a make-believe. Is your faith real, life-changing?

Is your faith real enough to alter your way of living? The man who claims his religious rituals and righteousness of himself. The man who prays within himself.

Honestly, he's kidding himself. The Lord Jesus says that the one that went home justified. The one that went home declared righteous was the one who bowed himself.

[8 : 25] In that humble heart prayer. That was heard prayer. And you need God today, I put to you. We all do. We need that sense of a conviction of sin, of our need of him.

We need to get a reality check. To bow in humble adoration. We need his mercy. And the one who big notes himself will be humbled, it says. He will be brought down.

He will be brought low. Yet the repentant will be lifted up. We can take heart there, can't we? The right way to come to God, as Spurgeon puts it, is to speak humbly with him.

For we are sinful. Speak prayerfully. For we are full of need. Speak believably. For Jesus has offered a sacrifice and we are accepted in and through him.

So how do we make use of this short message today? Do you want your prayer heard? That's the question. Don't regard iniquity in your heart.

[9 : 23] Repent. Turn from sin. Lay it all before him. Confess your need to him. Ask God for his mercy. God be merciful. To me, a sinner. Ask God for mercy.

Ask God for grace. His grace. And receive the work of Calvary on your part. Receive that work of Calvary for you. That there, Christ on the cross, he took and paid for our sin.

And trust him for that. Fall at his feet and plead for his forgiveness. His grace. There is no other way. May the Lord richly bless you.