
A SINNER’S PRAYER

Luke 18:9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: “Two men 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, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man (referring to the tax collector) went down to his house justified (he went down to his house right with God), rather than the other (rather than the Pharisee). For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Let’s pray. Father, we pray that you would open our hearts to your word this morning. You warn us and exhort us and invite us to let he who has ears to hear, hear. Lord, it’s possible to hear truth and yet it lands on a hard heart where it can’t bear fruit. So, Lord, we pray that your Spirit even now would be tilling the soil of our hearts to receive from your word and to be transformed by it. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Last week I was reading in the news of an elderly woman. She is 83-years-old, from Escambia County, in Florida. She went to the grocery store to pick up some groceries. She filled up her cart with groceries and she got a little confused on her drive home. In fact, she made a number of wrong turns on the way home and got lost. Now, when I mean lost, I mean like really lost, like her family couldn’t find her for a week. On the news they were saying this woman was missing. I’m sure Silver Alerts and all those things were going off. Social media was lighting on: “We can’t find Grandma.” Well, they found her a week later, living in her car down some dead-end dirt road. She survived because she had the groceries from the grocery store in her car. Confused, dehydrated, but she survived, praise the Lord, and was brought back to her family.

I share that story to say this: “How you go home matters.” The way you drive home, the way you go back to your house matters. Look again at verse 14 of this parable. Two of these men went to the temple. Two of these men went to church, if you will, to pray, to meet with God. But Jesus tells

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religious to think this way. We’re just good at being self-righteous -- all people -- religious, irreligious.

I like to go to the gym in the morning, normally. Sometimes I do, sometimes I don’t. I like to put on some music with a beat and I throw on a pop station. You have to be careful with that at times, because you’re like, “Oh, I don’t like this -- thumbs down on this one.” It just helps when you get on your bicycle and work out. A few weeks ago as I was thinking about this passage, I heard a song from a woman named Meghan Trainor, called “Me Too.” We’ll put the lyrics up to see what she is singing about here.

*Who’s that sexy thang I see over there?
That’s me, standin’ in the mirror.
What’s that icy thang hangin’ ‘round my neck?
That’s gold, show me some respect.*

*I thank God every day
That I woke up feelin’ this way.
And I can’t help lovin’ myself,
And I don’t need nobody else, nuh uh.*

*If I was you, I’d wanna be me too,
I’d wanna be me too,
I’d wanna be me too.*

The heart of the Pharisee, the trust of the Pharisee is alive and well. The therapeutic has so affected this country. Listen, I don’t want you to have self-loathing, but we are really good at feeling good about ourselves. We really are. We are really puffing. Everybody gets a trophy. No losers. We just always think we’re right, right? We trust in ourselves, then we look down on other people who disagree with us with disdain and contempt. And Jesus says, “Do Not Enter. Wrong Way.” **If you want to go home right with God, reject the Pharisee’s trust.**

There is another encounter with Jesus and a Pharisee in Luke, Chapter 7. A Pharisee named Simon invites Jesus over to have dinner at his house. There is a bunch of other religious people there, and this woman sneaks in who wants to see Jesus. She is a sinful woman. She wasn’t invited, but she is so eager to see Christ that she sneaks in and decides she has a great idea. She wants to wash Jesus’ feet. She brings in the most expensive ointment that she can find. She comes up to Christ and starts kissing his feet. She breaks open the oil and anoints his feet, and she washes the Savior’s feet. In fact, she washes them with her tears.

Simon sees this and thinks to himself, “If he knew what kind of woman she was, he would never allow this sort of thing.” Jesus, pulling out his omniscience card, says, “Simon, I have a story for you. There was a lender that had two people in debt to him. One of them owed about \$5000 (updating the amount) and the other owed about \$50,000. Neither of them could pay the lender, but the lender forgave both. Who do you think would be more grateful?” Simon said, “I suppose the one who had the greater debt.” “See this woman? I came here and you didn’t give me a kiss. You didn’t wash my feet. You didn’t do anything. And she is washing my feet with her tears. He who is forgiven little loves little, but he who is forgiven much loves much, and this woman’s sins, though they are many, are forgiven. Woman, your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

Listen, if you are here this morning and you have blown it, Jesus pronounces forgiveness upon you if you come to him, but we must reject Simon’s way of thinking. We must reject the Pharisee’s trust.

II. Second turn: We must repeat the sinner’s prayer.

Jesus invites us. This is a “One Way” sign. You must go this way. Repeat the sinner’s prayer. Look again at what the Pharisee prayed in 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!’” In bible times a tax collector was the worst job you could have if you were Jewish, because it meant that you sold yourself out to the enemy. You were a Jewish person taking money from your family and giving it to the Romans. By the way, I bet you that the “extortioners” and the “unjust” titles in the Pharisee’s prayers were leveled at him, because they were good at extortion.

A little bit over we learn about Zacchaeus’ conversion. He says, “Everyone I have defrauded, I will give it back and more. Because that’s what we do -- we extort. Give me some extra and we’ll protect your family.” They were bad. But listen: This guy saw his sin. His conversion is legitimate. He is convicted over the wrong things he has done. Why? How do we know? We see his shame, right? He is standing far off. He can’t even look up to heaven, he is so ashamed.

I have four little kids. My oldest is seven. You do the math. My life is crazy, right? When they do something wrong and I go up to them and say, “Look Daddy in the eyes,” they can’t do it. They can’t look me in the eyes. “Look Daddy in the eyes.” He can’t even look up to heaven. He is beating his chest, ashamed of himself.

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If we're honest with ourselves, each one of us has things in our lives that we are ashamed of. You may say, "Well, I haven't committed adultery." Or maybe you have, but Jesus even says that if you look at another person with lustful intent, that's adultery in your heart. If our thoughts were put up on a screen, I think we would all flee from this room right now, myself included, because sin has touched all of us – our thinking, our feeling, our actions.

That prayer for the tax collector isn't just the prayer for the really, really, really, really bad people. That's the prayer for everybody who wants to receive God's mercy. Listen, you don't want God's justice. The Pharisee thinks he is a just man and he is not. Just his self-righteousness is sufficient to condemn him, let alone all the other sins in his life that he is completely blind to. **The tax collector, the sinner's prayer is this: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Mercy is at the heart of the good news of Jesus Christ. Mercy is at the heart of the Christian faith. And mercy is this: That you don't get what you deserve, because if you did, you would experience God's wrath. You don't get that if you get mercy.**

I've got a good friend over here in the front. Just pretend he and I were really angry at each other. In fact, he's got a pretty big truck. Imagine we were so mad at each other that he took his truck and drove it into my house. Just pretend. I love you, friend. You would never do that. Just pretend. Alright, he drove it into my house and destroyed the front of my house. "What are you doing?! I hate you!" Now, I could forgive him and pray the price myself. "Friend, I love you. I forgive you." I could pay that price, absorb that price. Or I could say, "You owe me big," and that would be justice. He should pay me, right? He did it! He transgressed. He deserves to pay it. But if I forgive him, that's mercy.

The sinner comes before God and doesn't plead for his justice. We plead for his mercy. We know we deserve his justice, but we are asking him to forgive us instead. He is asking for God's mercy.

The mercy of God comes to us through the person and work of Jesus Christ. The very one sharing this parable is the one who has purchased and offers you the mercy of God this morning, if you would humble yourself and repeat the sinner's prayer. Jesus extends mercy. In fact, look over in Chapter 17, verses 11 through 19. Do you see the story of the ten lepers? Notice this: They are crying out to him. Verse 13: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Jesus heals them, all ten of them. Verse 19: "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well." The Greek there reads, "Your faith has saved you."

Look again at verse 35 of Chapter 18. There is a blind beggar calling out to Jesus as he is on his way to Jerusalem to die for our sins. He is passing through Jericho and there is a man crying out in verse 37: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus asks him in verse 41: “What do you want me to do for you?” He says, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” And Jesus says to him, “Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.” The Greek again: “Your faith has saved you.” Remember the woman who washed Jesus’ feet? “Go in peace. Your faith has saved you.”

The mercy of Christ is offered to anyone this morning who trusts in Jesus Christ -- anyone who reaches out and calls out to Jesus Christ, saying, “Jesus, have mercy on me!” The mercy of God the Father will rest upon you and you will go home right with God. Repeat the sinner’s prayer.

At the end of my sermon today, I want to invite people forward. Not now. I want to give you a chance to pray, to pray that prayer -- and not simply to repeat it like a magical formula, but to believe it, because your faith will save you if you call out to Jesus. Repeat the sinner’s prayer.

III. Third and final turn: Receive the savior’s righteousness.

Jesus told this parable to those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. Not only does Jesus give you mercy, but listen, church, everyone here: You need righteousness, but you don’t need it from yourself. Your sin has blown it. Jesus offers you his righteousness this morning.

All those who pray that sinner’s prayer, all those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, listen: **Jesus died for your sins on the cross. But not only does he cancel your sins, he offers his perfect life to cover you and clothe you in his righteousness.**

This man went home justified. That’s a special term in the New Testament, because it talks about God counting somebody righteous. We learn in the book of Romans and elsewhere that through faith God justifies, counts righteous the ungodly because he gives the righteousness of Jesus to you. You need righteousness this morning, make no mistake. But it’s not found inside of you, it’s found in heaven. It’s found at the right hand of God the Father.

Jesus died for you, rose from the dead, and is standing there. He will grant you his righteousness and take and cancel all of your sins if you trust in him this morning. If you repeat that sinner’s prayer, if you reject the Pharisee’s trust, and if you come to him, his arms are open wide. Forgiveness was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

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You don't need to go home uncertain. Jesus has made it very plain here. Listen, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled. But even if one here this morning, just one, Jesus says, humbles himself, you will be exalted. We want to give you an opportunity to do that.