

# God's mercy to sinners (Quality: Good)

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[ 0 : 00 ] The Gospel according to Luke, chapter 18, the latter part of verse 13.

The Gospel according to Luke, chapter 18, the latter part of verse 13. God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Whilst we have often quoted this prayer, often prayed it, yet we cannot ever remember speaking from it.

But as we were seeking to know the Lord's mind and will, we came to this word.

It seemed to find not only a place within our heart, but also it expressed our own personal desires.

[ 1 : 15 ] Several years since we first prayed this prayer. It's a prayer which will never wear out in the experience of all the Lord's people.

It matters not who they are or what they are. If they're one of the Lords, this will be their constant prayer to the Lord from a feeling heart, that the Lord will be merciful to them.

The Lord spoke this by way of a parable. But he got these two characters, the Pharisee and the publican.

And the Lord often spoke by way of parables. And also there were those occasions when he spoke of certain things happening. There was a certain man or a certain woman.

And therefore we want to distinguish between a parable and those things which actually took place. Now with a parable, the Lord took to explain to the people who he was speaking to, everyday occurrences.

[ 2 : 36 ] Those things which were very common, that they would easily understand. And he often used these metaphors when he was preaching the gospel, as indeed he was.

And he speaks of these two characters. And they were well acquainted with both of them. There was the Pharisee, who was a very upright man, naturally speaking.

And he was looked upon for his religion. And he was one who did his utmost to fulfil God's law.

And I believe that in some measure at least, those things which he said, as he came before the Lord in that temple, 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. He addressed himself to God.

[ 4 : 04 ] Now the publican, he too, addressed himself to God. But two totally different gods. There was that God, who the publican saw by faith, as one who was able to look upon him as a sinner.

The God who the Pharisee prayed to was a God, who he thought would look upon him for his merits. And there's a vast difference between those two gods.

One is the God of this world, the prince of this world, Satan, and the other is the God of Israel. Now the publican, he was a different type altogether.

They were known for their outrageous life and acts. It was their job to collect the money from those poor peasants who the Lord had so graciously looked upon and they were so dependent, as it were, upon the Lord, even for those things regarding time.

But how those rich men who owned all the land employed these publicans to go to these poor peasants and to extract from them every penny that it was possible to accumulate their wealth.

[ 5 : 40 ] and they used various ways of doing this and how they would long before the time when the occasion would come that they would take over this land, they would tender, as it were, as we tender today for various works, they would tender for this particular plot of ground and then republicans would seek to extract as much as they could from them but at the same time they would also assess that which the land would produce and there would be attacks on that as well.

And so it left, as it were, the door wide open for them to use all sorts of extortions to obtain that which was unjust.

And also that the Jews if they knew that there was in a family a publican they would not consent to a marriage in that family.

They were such bad characters. And so here we can see these two characters those who are upright and honest naturally speaking and the others who were absolute rogues with regard to the things of time.

Now one would never think that the Lord Jesus in his ministry would set forth these two characters in such a way and bring them into this parable.

[ 7 : 23 ] But there is all wisdom understanding with this God and he spoke with regard to these two men and this poor publican was one who was the subject of faith.

Previously in this chapter the Lord says nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh shall he find faith on the earth. He doesn't speak with regard to righteous men.

He doesn't speak with regard to gracious characters those who fulfilled his law but when the Son of Man cometh shall he find faith on the earth.

Now true and living faith is something which is not only lacking in the churches today and in our leaders today but is lacking very sadly in our own hearts.

True and living faith. We may have a faith of a sort but shall he find faith? This is the faith of God's elect.

[ 8 : 34 ] We can have faith in all sorts of things. Now you see the Pharisee had faith but his faith was based upon his own merits. His faith was based upon what he was and what he did and he looked to that as bringing about some justification before God.

Well it's natural isn't it that he would. And it's natural that you and I would too. When we're brought first of all to know God when the Lord reveals himself to us it's God.

Now this is where the publican started. It is God. Now the God that he saw was a totally different God to the God which the Pharisees saw.

the Pharisee as he came before his God was seeking justification by works.

There's nothing wrong in works there's nothing wrong in doing that which is right. How we would desire that we could live like a Pharisee in that sense but not to trust upon it.

[ 9 : 49 ] but how the poor publican had had his sin revealed. It doesn't mean to say that he was one of the worst of these publicans.

It could well be that he was one who was different to the majority. He could have been a different type altogether to the general run of publicans.

But the fact remains that this he had a view of God and when he saw God he saw himself. Now when you and I are brought first of all by faith to see God at the same time we should see ourselves.

And we should see ourselves in a totally different light to what we once saw ourselves. We may endeavor to be like the Pharisee and do what we consider to be right and that which will bring about our justification.

But how we shall have to prove that whatever we do that we shall never obtain that justification. Now this poor publican he couldn't even get near this Pharisee.

[ 11 : 09 ] He probably as a man saw something in that Pharisee as being very upright and very honest and very honest in his business dealings and realizing himself that his own work brought him into contact if not his own sin brought him into contact with sin and also with ungodly characters.

And as he looked upon that Pharisee as a holy man he felt not only could he not be close to him but he felt far off in his own heart from God.

And so he stood far off. And one is right I think in assuming that he stood far off from the Pharisee and feelingly felt far off from his God.

But what a difference there was in the eyes of God in those two men. Now when we're first brought upon by the Holy Spirit and when true and living faith is first realized within our heart we should feel just like that Pharisee.

We should feel just like that publican. We should feel and see this God as he is. We should see God as never before. We should see in that God more of a creator.

[ 12 : 33 ] we should see that he is a just, a holy God and we should see his law and his law will be before us more than the works of creation.

And we should see God. And we should see God as that judge with all his majesty. We should see him as an upright God, a God who cannot look upon sin, but faith will grant unto us a gleam of hope in mercy.

Wherever would we have been when we were brought there, and I trust that there's some here tonight and nobody needs to be brought there, if we could not have played this prayer, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

He didn't look at the Pharisee and say, Lord, make me like him. Give me that ability that I might come up to his standard.

There's that within our heart that we would at times long to come up to the standard of some. But the more we know of ourselves, and the Lord will see that we do, well then the less we shall think of ourselves.

[ 13 : 55 ] And the more we struggle to become a Pharisee, the more the Lord will teach us of our own weaknesses. And it's great mercy if the Lord does deal with us in this light, that we're able to see this God as God.

If only we could see this God more as God. As we go about in our daily business, as we deal with the things of the church, as we come before him in prayer and reading his word, if only we could see this God as God.

How seldom do we see this God as God, if we're honest before him tonight. We often come and take his name, like the Pharisee did God, but is there any real meaning in it?

Is there any reality in this God that we're approaching? Is there that faith within our heart as we call upon his name to believe that this God is God?

Those very things that we call upon his name for that he will fulfill, grant to us? Is not our mind wandering? Are we not as men, looking at the outward appearance?

[ 15 : 21 ] How seldom do we come before God with the earnestness that this poor man did as he smote upon his breast?

And he said, God, that's where his trouble was in here. Men talk about heart sins, but in that heart there will be actual sins as well.

He'll see his sins not within his heart. He won't see his sins as coming from Adam, but he'll see his sins coming from his fallen nature, his wretched heart.

That heart which will have nothing to do with God, that heart which cannot and will not recognize God as a sovereign in his life, that heart which will follow its own sinful inclinations if left to do so.

And that heart will bring ruin upon his soul, apart from the grace and the mercy of God. That's where he was feeling his agony, and that's what he had to bring to his God.

[ 16 : 33 ] He couldn't look at the man beside of him, like the Pharisee could. That Pharisee, he was so good, in his own opinion, that he could look upon that publican and despise him.

And not because of what he was in his business life, but he looked upon him because of the way he prayed. As if he couldn't, there was no good in that man at all, he couldn't even pray to God and tell him the good things that he done.

Now can you? Are you able to go before God and call upon his name and to thank him that you're not like other men? God, it's in our nature isn't it?

And if we don't come before this God, if we don't tell him so, we think it, don't we? At least I do. And I would desire to be honest in these things.

Often, there's that within our heart, well, I'm glad I'm not like that person. And when do we have that within our heart? God, why, when we think we're better than somebody else, and how often that is, how often we look at others, and we think, well, of course, we're better than those folk, and we can always find fault with others, can't we?

[ 17 : 59 ] But how difficult it is to find fault with ourselves. But, God, God, when we come before God, and when we realise this God, who he is and what he is, how different then, how our mind is taken off of others, and how it's centred upon ourselves.

God, be merciful. Now, he saw something in this God, although he saw him as being holy, although he saw him being righteous and just, there was one thing that he could plead, and our mind went to that 107th psalm as well this afternoon, let the redeemed of the Lord say so.

And this man, as he stood before the Lord, he was saying so, he was telling this God, that he was a merciful God. He didn't say so in so many words, but he realised it, and he knew that there was mercy with this God, and therefore he was a merciful God, God.

Now you see the difference between the God of the Pharisee and the God of the publican. The God of the Pharisee was a God, who was a God who sought after and demanded justice, holiness, righteousness.

In other words, he was a God who demanded the fulfilment of his law. Ah, but you say surely the God of the publican did. he did. But there was no mercy, no mercy whatever, with the God that the Pharisee was praying to.

[ 19 : 41 ] But the publican, his God was one who sought mercy, he was a God who sought justice, he was a God who sought the fulfilment of the law in its entirety, authority, he was not satisfied with a partial fulfilment of it, he was a God who required the complete fulfilment of his law, he was a God who could not look upon sin, and therefore he could not permit sinners in their fallen condition to enter heaven, and he was a God, faithful and couldn't alter, and as that man looked upon him, he saw this, and therefore there was only one thing left, and that was mercy, I would give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth forever, now this man, he was taught by faith, that his

God was a merciful God, although he didn't know he was his God, but he pleaded for mercy, now I believe, that this prayer, is exactly the same, as when one is taught by grace, as their first words before God, as a little babe might call out to the parent, just that one word, that short word, which, as it were, rejoices the heart of the parent, so this prayer, as it proceeds, out of the heart of a sinful wretch, rejoices the heart of God the Father, through his dear son, the Lord Jesus, this is another soul, another redeemed soul, praying, as Paul, or Saul as he was then, on that Damascus road, when the Holy Spirit touched him,

God said this, behold, he prayeth, the first breathing, and the first address, God, an acknowledgement of God, have you known what it is to acknowledge God, as being that ruler of the universe, but above all, being a just and a holy God, and then to be brought to seek that mercy, well now, how is this mercy to be brought about, because this man, he couldn't pray like the Pharisee, he couldn't justify himself, so works, were not a means of justification, works are good, but they were never justified the soul, we are not to frown upon good works, there are those that do, the more good works that we do, well then, there is an evidence perhaps, that we know something of right, we shall not be able to pass by the other side of the street, when we see one who is wounded, one who is in need, he that hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion, where is the gift of God in him, but, whatever we do, with regard to works, we will never, never save our souls, it's the work of faith, that will bring about works, and James says, well, show me your works, but I'll show you my faith, and then, the works follow faith, faith first, works afterwards, well then, this Pharisee, he had plenty of works, and how he rolled them off, with regard to his prayer and his garden, how he came into that temple, full of pride, and how he despised the poor publican, the publican, how he sought that mercy, and yet, what did he know of

Christ, what does the sinner know of Christ, what does he know of God, when he pleads for mercy, does he realise that he is merciful, does he realise that that God, and we say it reverently, this God cannot resist the prayer, of a sinner pleading for mercy from his very heart, I say he cannot resist it, because he's a merciful God, he's full of mercy, but, before you and I can pray for mercy, before you and I are brought to know this God, it must be the work of the Holy Spirit to lead us into that experience, blessings, now the trouble today is this, that there's so many Pharisees today, and they boast of what they're doing for the Lord, but they've never been brought, as this poor publican was, to see God rightly, have you, have I, have we seen this God rightly, have we seen him as he is, and then have we seen him in such a way that we've had to plead with him for mercy, now whilst this man went to the temple to pray, and sought for mercy,

I believe this, it wasn't the first time, it wouldn't be the last time he prayed for mercy either, God, be merciful to me, now to me, the other man was I, what I have done, but it's me, look at me, look what I am, have you known the difference between me and I, there's a lot in it, you see, I, is full of pride, is full of what I can do, and what I'm going to do, and what I think, but me, when we've seen ourselves, as we appear, as a sinner before God, me, we shan't be able to come before God and say I, with that proud I before him, we shall have to come see me, God be merciful to me, look at me, I'm a publican, now frowned upon by my fellow creatures, but whatever must I appear before thee,

[ 26 : 19 ] God be merciful to me, I've got nothing to come before thee with, I've got nothing that I can bring, I can't speak of what I've done, why my very business, what I'm involved in, is nothing but roguery, and what am I to do, I've got to get this living, I've got to live upon the face of this earth, I've got to do this, I've got to do the other, that's the argument, isn't it, within, how you see that sin works within, so that when we would do good, even when we're pleading for mercy, evil is working within as well, and so the poor man, all he can do is to plead for mercy, God, be merciful to me, I wonder how many here tonight, even out of this little company, have known what it is, to have to go before this God on your bended knees, on this short prayer, and then get up, and leave it and hope that this God will grant you mercy, ah, you say,

I know what it is to have to pray this prayer without getting down on my bended knees, the way in which Satan comes, you say, well of course these two men, they went into the temple to pray, yes, well of course, you see, the sinner, when he's under conviction, how these things are revealed to him in a different way, how Satan will say, well of course, you can't just pray anywhere, you can't just kneel down, or you can't speak to the Lord without going to the proper place, you must go to the temple to pray, the other one went to the temple to pray obviously, in his own strength, the other one went hoping, trusting, that he might be heard, but how we have to prove this, that if our case is real, we shan't be able to wait until we get to God's house to pray, we won't be able to wait until we get to the prayer meeting, to pray this prayer, it will be so urgent, that whatever we're doing, whatever we're occupied with, this prayer will force itself out of our very heart, and it's that which is like a disease within our body, that which is bringing us to our end, rapidly, and there's that groaning within, mercy, mercy,

I think we've told you how on one occasion we heard a man screaming as he was entering eternity, saying he didn't want to die, he wanted mercy from the doctors, he wanted someone there to save his life, that's what he was thinking about, and that's what this poor publican wanted, he wanted someone to save his soul, he wanted mercy, now you see it wasn't the things of time that he wanted mercy for, he wanted mercy for his soul, he said I'm a sinner, now the hymn writer says this, a sinner is a sacred thing, the Holy Ghost has made him so, and a sinner is a sacred thing, not the sinner, not the sinner, as we look upon him, but the sinner who is wrought upon by faith, that he sees himself a sinner before God, now there's a difference between one who is brought to know himself as a sinner before

God, and one who acknowledges himself as a sinner before men, when we are wrought upon by the Holy Spirit, we should be a sinner before God, as well as a sinner before men, but we should not be so concerned about the sins that we've committed against men, our chief concern will be the sins that we've committed against God, as David said, against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy side, we were thinking about Rahab today, and the way in which she sinned in telling a lie, and yet you see, with regard to her, the way in which she spoke, she was speaking, as it were, on behalf of God, we should not go to hell for sinning against men, we should go to hell for sinning against God, and we should go to heaven for the mercy of

God, if ever we get there, we should never go to heaven because we haven't sinned, because all have sinned, and all have come short, sin will bar you completely from heaven, so here we're all even, we're all equal, because none of us can say we've never sinned, and if we do, well that's the greatest sin of all, because it's unbelief, but it's mercy that will get us to heaven, and this dear man, he was able to seek for mercy, now he went down to his house, justified, than the other, this word rather is put in by the translators, to explain more than one is able to bring out the original, but he went down to his house, justified, than the other, what was he justified, while the

[ 32 : 11 ] Pharisee tried to justify himself before God, and bring about his salvation, and he rested upon it, and I suppose, he had a certain amount of comfort from it, but the publican, he was justified, by the works, and the sacrifice, of the dear redeemer, God, what a difference it makes when one is brought to know something of this, by experience, the law first, and then the gospel, to see that there is justification, through Christ, now we cannot justify ourselves, but how the Lord Jesus could justify his people, you see, the Pharisee, in spite of all his goodness, was a sinner, but the Lord Jesus, he was good in every way, and there was no sin in him whatever, and therefore he could justify, he could justify himself, he never sinned, there was a justification in Christ, which was a complete justification before God the Father, he never sinned against his Father, and therefore he was just, he was holy, he was righteous, and there was everything in him, he didn't boast of his justice, and how just he was before others, but we could see his example, we had his example before us, as he walked through this sinful land, through this sinful world, but, he and he alone is able to justify you and I, and here we get the gospel, here is the justification, he sought mercy, now the mercy of

God can be found alone in that just redeemer, in other words, the justice and the justification which the publican obtained as he went down to his house justified was not what he brought about himself, but what Christ brought about on his behalf, he fulfilled the law for him, as if to say, now I can't, you can't fulfill the law, you can't justify yourself, but I can justify you, and I'll show you how it is, that I'll take the punishment for your sins, I'll take whatever was due to you upon myself, and then God sees me, instead of you, he sees me as just and holy, he sees me as his dear son, he sees me as one who has borne the burden of sin, he sees me as one that has taken the punishment of your sin, and that will justify you, now you cannot be justified, doesn't matter who you are, by any other means, whoever you are, you can go to church, chapel, you can shut yourself into a convent or monastery, you can pray day and night, you can read

God's word, but you will never justify yourself, only God can justify it, and he does this through his own dear son, now he went down to his house justified, why, because he was seeking mercy, is there someone here tonight, that knows what it is, and perhaps at this present time is seeking mercy through the Lord, perhaps not feeling justified, the scriptures don't tell us that he went down to his house feeling justified, but what it does say, he went down to his house justified, than the other, in other words, the other man, he didn't go down to his house justified, because he couldn't justify himself, but to seek the mercy of God, seeking the merits of his dear son, now God the father, he loves to hear those children, whom he gave to his son, pleading, for his merits, now the merits you see which justification are brought about are the merits of Christ, there's a lot missing, in the prayer of the Pharisee, he may not have committed those sins, but he didn't seek to be forgiven his pride, he didn't seek to be forgiven his self-justification, he didn't confess or repent his sin, did he?

But here we have a poor penitent sinner, and as we sung that second hymn, and how the first hymn seemed to go along very well with the subject, but how over the top of the second hymn that we sung, Faith and Repentance, Faith and Repentance, that's what the Republican had, Faith and Repentance, God, he believed in God, he believed in a merciful God, he repented of his sin, why did he repent?

Because he'd been taught what sin was, he'd been taught what God was, and therefore he could come, he had faith to believe in God, he had repentance within his heart for his sin, and he sought mercy, he sought forgiveness, and he found justification, the gospel is sweet to a sinner, now we better make this clear before we close, and it's this, we said a sinner is a sacred thing, the Holy Ghost has made him so, whilst those who produced our hymn book try to make this clear, how necessary it is to make it clear, a sinner is a sacred thing, that is a sinner who is brought to know his sinnership by the work of the Holy Spirit, not an out and out sinner, not those who know not the Lord, not those who are brought not seeking mercy, but trusting their own righteousness, but a sinner who is taught by the

[ 38 : 42 ] Holy Spirit, those whom the Holy Ghost has illuminated their eyes in such a way that they see God in his holiness, they see God as that one who cannot look upon sin, but they know themselves beyond all doubt to be a sinner, and their sins are ever before them, don't you think that when this man went down to his house justified, that he would have no more trouble with sin, the law have dominion over a man as long as he liveth, and how that sin will have dominion over a man as long as he liveth, but sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace, now there's a difference between the law and grace, sin, sin can have dominion over a man as long as he lives, and then he doesn't know grace, he doesn't know mercy, and he sinks into hell, the other man, he has sin, having dominion over him, that is over his body, not over his spirit, as long as he lives, and right down to his dying moment, there'll be sin within his body, but that seed which is within cannot sin, and sin will not have dominion, because when he comes to the end, grace will have dominion over the sinner that's received mercy, but sin will have dominion over the Pharisee, there's never no mercy, now there's a warning here, because if you and I are

Pharisees, if we're satisfied with our religion, if we're satisfied with what we do, we're doing this and we're doing that, we go to the house of God regularly, we pray and read the scriptures night and morning, and of course we wouldn't have anything to do with the world or the worldling, we separate ourselves, we do this, we're very good folk in our own eyes, you can go down right to the end, and sin will have dominion over you right in your last moments, but you can be brought to sin, vile, great, evil, you can bring evil upon the church of God, even as Saul did, and have sin reign as it were within your members, and you have to come as a guilty sinner, as Paul did, a wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death, for sin shall not have dominion over you, yet not under the law, but under grace, now that is the difference, the Pharisee was under the law, the publican was under grace, he sought for mercy, or may we never, never trust upon what we are, may we never look to self, may we never for a moment trust upon anything short, and the blood, the righteousness of that

God who alone is able to justify us through his dear son, God, be merciful to me, a sinner, or to be able to have this upon our lips, as we take our last breath, because it's mercy that we want, I feel to need it more than ever, I don't know about some of you, I need this mercy more than ever I did, more than when I was under the law, more than when I was first convinced of sin, as I trust and believe I was, I still need this mercy more than ever, and as that day approaches, when I feel, and it can't be far off, but I must stand before this God, I shall need that mercy, God, be merciful to me, a sinner, comes to something very personal, doesn't it, and death will be a very personal matter, and it will be a very personal matter, when we have to stand before this God, it will be me, it will be you, and this great eye will be brought down, if the Lord can point condemnation to us, as indeed he will, apart from the merits of his dear son, we must leave it, may the

Lord have his blessing, amen. Amen.