

The Wednesday Word, April 12, 2023: No Other Hope

In Luke 18:9-14 Jesus spoke a parable to people who were self-righteous and who, because of their imagined righteousness, looked down on others. (*See verse 9*). Here's what the Master said. "Two men went up to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'O God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week and tithe (*give a tenth of all that I earn*)'

'The tax collector stood afar off, and would not lift even his eyes to heaven, and smote (*kept beating*) his breast saying, ' God, be merciful to me a sinner.' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified (*accepted*) with God rather than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Back in New Testament times the devout Jew observed three prayer times daily, 9 a.m., 12 midday, and 3 p.m. Many Jews also thought that prayers offered in the Temple were especially effective.

In this story, Jesus introduces us to two people who went up to the Temple to pray. **First**, there was a Pharisee. This particular gentleman did not really go to the Temple to pray to God. Instead, he went to his supposed prayer time to inform God about how good he was.

As Jesus said in verse 11, "He prayed with himself."

Then there was the **second** person, a tax collector. He stood afar off and would not even lift his eyes to God. His sin had humbled him for what he literally prayed was, "O God, be a **mercy seat** to me **the sinner**." He felt he was not merely a sinner but felt he was the supreme sinner. He was heartbroken by His sin and knew his only remedy was the mercy of God.

This parable unmistakably tells us certain things about prayer.

First, we learn that a person who despises others (v 9) cannot pray. Let's face it, how can we pray if, as we are kneeling before the Throne of Grace, we are found to despise others?

We also learn that no one who is proud can pray. The greatest of all errors is seeking to proudly stand before God on the basis of our own works. As we approach God, we need to know that Jesus Christ is our complete and only righteousness. Luther said, "Beware of self-righteousness. If our labours, obedience and afflictions could have given peace to the conscience, why would Christ have died on the cross? You will never find true peace until you find it and keep it in this: that Christ takes all your sins upon Himself and bestows all His righteousness on us."

Yes indeed! May we always remember, in true prayer, we don't present our righteousness to God. No doubt all that the Pharisee in our story said was true. He did fast; he tithed; and was not as other men ... especially that wretched tax collector. But that did not make him righteous before God. In measuring our righteousness the question is not, "Am I as good as my fellowmen?" The question is, "Am I as good as God?"

It all depends on what we compare ourselves with. When we set our lives beside the life of Jesus and see the holiness of God, all that is left for us to say is, "God be a mercy seat to me--the sinner."

"No other Lamb, no other Name,
No other Hope in heaven or earth or sea,
No other Hiding-place from guilt and shame,
None beside Thee."

And that's the Gospel Truth!