

**Intro:**

About twenty five years ago, I came across our passage for today. I was a brash young man, I am afraid. (Now I am a brash middle-aged man!)

As I meditated on the passage, I found myself strongly rebuked by our Lord's teaching. In fact, I used that rebuke in our morning devotions at the Print Shop where I worked.

I have thought about this passage many times through the years. I suppose I go over it in my mind several times every year. It is still a strong rebuke to me.

I hope that you will find our passage, a very familiar parable, to be a blessing to you, one that will instruct you concerning your prayers as well.

I have entitled the message *A Saving Prayer*. The one who prayed it, in the parable, Jesus said was justified – declared righteous. In this prayer, we find the way of salvation, if we will grasp it.

It is also the way to having prayers heard by God.

Of course, there is another prayer in the parable, one that will not justify. You can examine the two prayers and see which fits your heart when you pray.

I am speaking of the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, Lk 18.9-14

Read Lk 18.9-14

**Proposition:** The Lord hears and answers the believing prayer of humility.

## **I. The pointed nature of the parable (9)**

- A. The previous parable, the parable of the unjust judge was told in the context of second coming teaching
  1. Told primarily to the disciples, although others listening
  2. Told in answer to questions from the Pharisees (17.20-21)
- B. This parable returns attention to 'certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous'
  1. The reference to the Pharisees must have been obvious as he was telling this
  2. The fact is that there are many who trust in themselves today, thinking they have achieved their own salvation
  3. Note these observations
    - a. The Lord first answered the Pharisees that they must develop spiritual discernment in order to see the kingdom (17.21)

- b. The Lord then turned to the disciples and taught concerning the certainty of the coming of the kingdom
  - 1) Taught them to be always ready, signs or not (17.22-37)
  - 2) Taught them to pray for the kingdom, though the Lord might delay (18.1-8)
- c. Having taught discernment, the Lord taught once again the means of gaining spiritual discernment: the saving prayer (18.9-14)

## II. The contrasting prayers of the parable (10-13)

### A. The pious prayer of the Pharisee (11-12)

1. He compared himself to other men – favorably (11)
  - a. Extortioners
  - b. Unjust
  - c. Adulterers
  - d. Even as this publican

The whole basis of this man's justification was his superiority to 'sinners'.

2. He promoted himself as *a very religious man* (12)
  - a. Fasting twice a week (as a good Pharisee should)
  - b. Paying tithes of all his income

The apostle Paul described himself as one who lived out the life of a Pharisee to its full:

- Phil 3.5
- Ac 23.6
- Ac 26.5

### B. The humble prayer of the Publican (13)

1. Simple
2. Direct
3. Repentant
4. Specific: "the sinner"

## III. The divine assessment of prayers (14)

- A. One man went to his house justified: declared righteous
- B. Principle of exaltation

1. Self-exaltation begets humiliation
2. Self-abasement begets divine exaltation

The apostle Paul's Spirit-filled new heart attitude:

- Phil 3.7-8

#### IV. The modern application: who are you?

- A. Our tendency, in reading this parable, is to identify ourselves with the Publican
1. "Oh Lord, I thank you that I am a publican, not like my neighbour..."
  2. Or "my husband..."
  3. Or "my wife..."
  4. Or "my parents..."
  5. Or "my co-workers..."

You see, we are experts at discerning the sinfulness of others, and our superiority to them.

What is the consequence of this attitude? No Justification – yet in your sins.

- B. Our need is to identify ourselves with the Publican's prayer
1. God, be merciful to me, a sinner
  2. Prayed in faith, such a prayer brings justification

#### Conclusion:

When I first came across this passage and thought of it this way, I was either a senior or a graduate student. I thought of my progress through the years at university.

- When I was a freshman, I thanked God I wasn't like the high school kids...
- When I was a sophomore, I thanked God I wasn't like the freshman...
- When I was a junior ... not like the sophomores...

You see, it was always me that was righteous, no one else.

You cannot come to God if you think you are righteous – you can only come to God if you realize your unworthiness and unrighteousness before Him.