

Searching the Scriptures / 79 / The Publican Who Cried Out To God For Mercy / Part 4

Today we want to examine the account of the Publican and Pharisee in Luke 18:9–14 for a better understanding of what God means by crying out to Him for mercy. Let us consider these two points:

1. What We Learn from the Pharisee’s Prayer
2. What We Learn from the Publican’s Prayer

1. What We Learn from the Pharisee’s Prayer

God sets the stage for us in Luke 18:9 by introducing those to whom this parable was addressed: *“And he [Jesus] spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others...”*

Immediately we know that the two sins of pride and lack of love are very much in evidence as we read through this account. The words of Luke 16:14–15 speak to this very issue: *“And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he [Jesus] said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”*

Let’s continue reading in Luke 18:10–12: *“Two men went up 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.”*

Notice that the Pharisee was not praying to God biblically—he prayed *“with himself”*. Because he was not approaching God in truth, humility, and in the fear of the Lord, God was not listening. Just look at his words—one can’t help but notice the personal pronoun *“I”* used four times in two sentences! He also prided himself for what he was not instead of acknowledging his sinfulness. He said he was not an extortioner, nor unjust, nor an adulterer, nor like a publican. That religious leader boasted ostentatiously. Without realizing it, he actually displayed that he was a liar as well. Instead of standing in the grace of God, that Pharisee was standing in his own pride, as Jesus pinpointed in Mat 6:5, *“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.”* The *“reward”* (or *“wages”*) that Christ has in view is to be punished in Hell forevermore.

2. What We Learn from the Publican’s Prayer

Now, let’s turn our attention to the rest of this account in Luke 18:13–14: *“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 every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”*

We must never forget that the publican was no more deserving of salvation than the Pharisee. What transpired has to do with the electing love of God entirely. Both men uttered words which were indicative of the condition of their hearts as Mark 12:34 reveals, *“... out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh.”* Only God can so work in a person’s soul as to bring about that which Jam 4:10 affirms, *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”*

Once again, the words of 1 Cor 1:27–29 ring out in praise to God’s rich grace and mercy: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are : **THAT NO FLESH SHOULD GLORY IN HIS PRESENCE.**