

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Luke 18:9-17

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. We'll continue to read Luke chapter; today we'll read verses 9 to 17.

In the previous eight verses, Jesus told us that prayer must be persistent and steadfast; He spoke about our attitude and practice in prayer. He deliberately used a parable, saying that an unjust judge, because the widow repeatedly asked and repeatedly troubled him, eventually got justice for her; yet our God is a righteous Judge—will He not get justice for His elect?

But in verse 7, He added a phrase, “though He bears long with them”; in other words, many times during the process of our prayer, God has not yet answered for our own good. Because certain environments come upon us to make us purer as a person and to refine our faith even more; at the same time, it is also for the sake of the people of this generation, to be patient with them and give them opportunity to repent and be saved. Therefore, Jesus encouraged us who follow Him wholeheartedly, in the matter of prayer, to ask persistently and steadfastly until the time He returns, so that on earth He may find some people who have faith. Then, beginning from verse 9, Jesus taught us about the content of prayer: the attitude and practice must be persistent and steadfast, but what about the content of prayer?

Verse 9: “Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:”

This parable was spoken specifically to those who felt they were better than others and considered themselves righteous. What did He say?

Verse 10: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.”

Jesus at the beginning pointed out the characteristics of the two men: one was a Pharisee, a self-righteous person; the other was a tax collector, a person looked down upon by others and who himself felt he was not worthy. And both of them went up to the temple to pray. Jesus specially brought out this example of prayer in the temple. We know that a Christian’s prayer life has two sides: one is private prayer, and the other is public prayer. The prayer in church prayer meetings is just like the prayer in the temple here.

Why did Jesus especially bring out public prayer? Because in private prayer, it is only ourselves and the Lord; we can very easily and directly tell God our true condition and ask God for help. I believe every person who has received grace and been saved has many things to confess and many things to ask for grace before God. When no one else is present, we can usually easily open ourselves completely to God, so private prayer is not too much of a problem. But in public prayer, because others are present, sometimes we like to make a show of it for others to see. This also explains why in church prayer meetings the number of people is usually the smallest. Many saints have the habit of private prayer but do not attend public prayer in church; we should be able to find the answer in this passage of Scripture.

Verse 11: “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.’”

Let us first look at this self-righteous Pharisee who felt he was very good. When he came before God to pray, on the surface it seemed like thanksgiving: he said, God, I thank You. Thank You for what? I am not like other men. In his prayer to God, he compared himself with others; especially when this tax collector stood beside him, he must have felt very pleased in his heart: in people’s eyes, he appeared to be a level higher than the tax collector. Therefore, not only did he feel this way in his

heart, but he also turned his inner feeling into prayer. He said: I am not like other men—others extort, I do not; others are unjust, I am righteous; others commit adultery, I do not; I am not like this tax collector. Although on the surface he said he thanked God, in reality he was accusing others.

Verse 12: “I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”

He openly displayed his law-keeping behavior. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6, the Lord Jesus told us in 6:16, “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.” This Pharisee openly declared the number of times he fasted and his tithing in his public prayer.

The principle of giving in the New Testament is that the left hand does not let the right hand know. Giving is our thanksgiving to God, offering what we have received, not to receive people’s praise. This self-righteous Pharisee, in the content of his prayer, on one hand accused others, and on the other hand openly declared some of his good behavior. Let us now turn back to look at that tax collector.

Verse 13: “And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’”

He deeply knew his true condition and knew that he was not qualified at all to make a public prayer in the temple. Therefore “he would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’” He came before God, clearly knowing that he was a sinner. Not only that, he was also willing to come before God, expose his unworthy condition before others, and ask God for grace and ask God for mercy. Regarding these two men coming to the temple to make public prayer, what did Jesus think?

Verse 14: “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

This man was the tax collector; the other was the self-righteous Pharisee. The Pharisee felt he was very good, so when he came to a place of public prayer, on one hand he criticized others, and on the other hand he openly declared many of his law-keeping behaviors. This self-righteous person came before Jesus, yet Jesus said that the tax collector went down justified rather than he.

Whether a person is righteous is not determined by what he himself says; only what God says counts. Regarding that self-righteous Pharisee, Jesus did not call him righteous. Instead, this sinner who came before God asking for grace and mercy—God would justify him. Because he recognized his own sin, and he was also willing to come before God to ask for God’s mercy. Not only did God show him mercy and forgive his sin, God also justified him. Of course, according to Romans we know that God justified him not because he did well himself, but because Jesus Christ died for him and Jesus Christ became his righteousness; therefore God justified him.

As a result Jesus brought out a conclusion, “for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” When we come before God, especially in a public prayer setting, we must first lay our true condition naked and open before God: whoever thinks he himself is very good, God will humble him. On the contrary, those who humble themselves, who know their true condition, and who come before God asking for grace and mercy—God will exalt them.

We may need to examine more carefully the public prayer meetings in the church: whether everyone inside uses very flowery language and many bold declarations. I am not saying that declarative prayer is bad, but whether your declaration is made in a truly humble heart attitude. What we declare is that God’s grace reigns in me and God’s grace is manifested through me, not that I myself have any goodness.

Many times, saints who are just beginning to learn public prayer like to imitate and like to have piled-up prayer words, yet in their hearts there is actually no real feeling at all. God wants us to come before Him naked and open, laying our true

condition before Him. Does He not already know what our condition is? Prayer is not us declaring to God; prayer is us coming before God to ask God for help. When you think you are very good, sorry, God's grace cannot flow to you. Only when we are like this tax collector, coming before God, recognizing that we are sinners and asking God for grace, will God justify us.

Verse 15: "Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them."

The disciples perhaps did it out of good intention, feeling that these little children coming to Jesus would prevent Jesus from teaching others with full concentration and would become an interruption.

Verse 16: "But Jesus called them to Him and said, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.'"

Immediately after Jesus taught us that when we come before God, the content of our prayer must be to expose our true condition before God and ask for God's grace, not to be self-righteous, Jesus said: Let the little children come to Me. Little children are innocent; little children are the best example of this kind of expression—they completely lay all their needs before adults. Jesus said, of such is the kingdom of God. They do not think they are good, they do not think they have already obtained, but they are willing to come before God to ask for God's grace.

Verse 17: "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

Jesus wants us to turn and become like little children in our heart attitude. Let us not think we have already obtained, like that self-righteous Pharisee, but know that there is still much room for growth in our life, and be willing to come before God

again and again in humility to ask God's grace to fill us once more. Only those who can be humble in this way and continually grow have the heart attitude of those who will inherit the kingdom of God.

How we hope that the public prayer meetings in the church will all become many little children coming before God, asking for God's grace and asking for God's mercy. Of course we know that little children here refers to heart attitude, not to wisdom or physical stature. God wants every child of His who has received grace and been saved to have the heart attitude of a little child; only then can we grow in the measure of our life and also grow in the wisdom of knowing God. May God help us to always come before God with a humble heart, asking for God's help; because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for telling us how we should pray. Also help us, in our personal prayer life and in private prayer, to be able to lay ourselves completely naked and open before You and ask for Your help. Also help us to be able to attend the church's public prayer meetings. In public prayer, may there be no condemnation and no comparison, but together with everyone ask for God's grace to descend abundantly and meet the needs of the church. Bless me and bless the church I belong to, so that we may all become a group of people who have received grace and are people of prayer. Thank You. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ.