

Luke 18

In this chapter in Luke's gospel, Jesus emphasizes the importance of humbly asking God for His mercy. This, rather than self-righteousness or self-sufficiency, is to be the foundational posture of our hearts toward God. This is the attitude that God seeks and to which He delights to respond. This is how we gain right standing with God, and this is how we access God's healing power.

*Luke 18:9 (NASB) He told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:
¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

Jesus told this parable to explain how we may be justified (declared in right standing) before God. Our prideful human hearts assume that God accepts us on the basis of our comparative righteousness (18:11) and our religious activities (18:12). If we live moral lives that are better than others, if we practice religious discipline, we assume that God will be impressed with us and reward us with a place in His kingdom. This mentality is the foundation of every other major world religion – but



Jesus rejects it outright. This attitude, He solemnly declares, is self-exalting. Those who approach God this way will *not* be justified (18:14).

If we cannot be justified by God through our own righteousness and religious activity, is there another way? Yes there is, says Jesus. It is way that is open to all – even to the worst of sinners. It is a simple way, so simple that even children may access it (see 18:15-17). If you humble yourself before God as the tax collector did, you will go home with God’s permanent acceptance. Notice how the tax-collector expressed this attitude in a short, simple prayer: ***“God, be merciful to me, the sinner.”***

- He spoke directly to God, whereas the Pharisee *“was praying this to himself.”* How easy it is to turn even prayer into an exercise in self-congratulation!
- He referred to himself as “the sinner.” Not “a sinner” – one sinner among many others, perhaps better than many. But “the sinner” – the one who is guilty before God, the one with no righteousness of his own to stand on.
- He therefore requested only one thing from God: “Be merciful to me.” The word for “Be merciful” literally means: “Be propitious to me” or “Make an atoning sacrifice for me.” He recognized that he could not pay the debt of his sin; God must provide a Substitute whose death will pay his debt. It was to be this very Substitute, to die for our sins, that Jesus came (Mark 10:45)! Lay hold of God’s justifying mercy, not by defending your righteousness, but by entrusting yourself to Jesus and His sacrifice for you.

God not only justifies us when we humbly ask Him for his mercy through Jesus. He also heals us from many of our infirmities when we ask Jesus to have mercy on us. This is the lesson we learn through Jesus’ encounter with the blind man later in Luke 18.



*Luke 18:35 As Jesus was approaching Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road begging. ³⁶ Now hearing a crowd going by, he began to inquire what this was. ³⁷ They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. ³⁸ And he called out, saying, “**Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!**” ³⁹ Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, “**Son of David, have mercy on me!**” ⁴⁰ And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him; and when he came near, He questioned him, ⁴¹ “What do you want Me to do for you?” And he said, “Lord, I want to regain my sight!” ⁴² And Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.” ⁴³ Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.*

This man (whose name was Bartimaeus) already believed in Jesus as the Messiah. This is evident because he called Jesus “Son of David” – one of the Messiah’s titles because God promised David that he would be the ancestor of the Messiah (see 1 Chronicles 17).

Notice what Bartimaeus requested from Jesus. Yes, when Jesus asked him specifically what he wanted, Bartimaeus said: “*I wish to regain my sight.*” But his initial request was more basic: “*Son of David, have mercy on me!*”

Those who led the way (Jesus’ disciples?) were annoyed by Bartimaeus’ request. They told him to shut up, perhaps implying that he was not important enough to warrant Jesus’ attention. But Jesus rejected their perspective. He is full of mercy, and He is invariably attracted to those who acknowledge their need for His mercy.

Like Bartimaeus, our brokenness (whether physical, spiritual, emotional or relational) is so profound that we are incapable of healing ourselves. Our only hope is in Jesus’ mercy; we come to Him and ask Him to give us His healing mercy in whatever way He deems best for us. We can “draw near to Him with confidence, (knowing that we will) receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).



When was the last time you called out to Jesus: “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Lord Jesus, I am grateful that You are full of mercy. You love to justify sinners who humble themselves. You delight in granting us access to Your healing mercy. Deliver me from the pride that denies my abject need and casts doubt on Your mercy. Help me to ask for Your mercy today for the many needs and problems that beset me. Help me to trust that You will answer this request.

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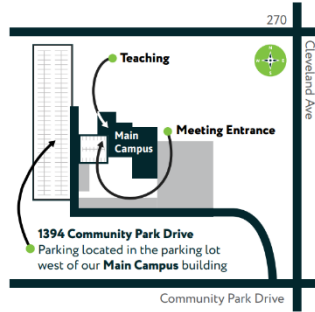
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