

# A True Communicant's Prayer

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**Bible Text:** Luke 18:13

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## Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation

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[music]

“Our help is in the name of the Lord who has made heaven and earth,”<sup>1</sup> who keeps truth forever and who never forsakes the work of his own hands.

“Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.”<sup>2</sup>

Amen.

Dear congregation, let us continue this worship service singing Psalter 64, all stanzas. “Lord, I lift my soul to thee. Oh, my God, I trust thy might.” All three stanzas of 64.

[singing]

The Scripture reading for this evening you can find in the gospel according to Luke chapter 18. Luke 18 verses one through 14.

Let us hear the Word of God.

And he [that is, Jesus] spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 124:8.

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 1:4-5.

long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 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. 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.<sup>3</sup>

This far the reading of God's holy and infallible Word. May he bless it to our souls this evening.

We wish to remember in prayer particularly and we encourage you to do the same the people in Haiti suffering a devastating earth quake. The Crull family, Jason and Philomena Crull and their little one Jaden are safe. No harm done to them, but many others. We have no idea how many thousands of people lost their lives and here we may be together in Church. Let's call upon his name in prayer.

*Great and glorious thou art, sovereign and just and good, an overflowing fountain of all good. And, Lord, even though thou art angry with the wicked every day, yet we may be in thy house as tokens of thy longsuffering kindness, thy patience with us, giving us life and breath while so many others in the past 24 hours lost their lives. Lord, who made us to differ from those? For there is no difference by nature. And not only, Lord, that we may have physical life, but that we may hear about the prince of life, that in him the Lord Jesus Christ we may have eternal life, forgiveness of sins and life eternal.*

*We are so privileged, Lord, please help us to see it. Help us to humble ourselves before thee, before thy holiness, but also before thy goodness and mercy, Lord, that we may be gathered around thy Word. Grant that we may see what immense privilege that is. We thank thee, Lord, for the unspeakable gift of thy Son who came to suffer and to die so that sinners such as we all are may have life, that we would not perish, Lord, in our sins and sink away in eternal condemnation as, undoubtedly so many who do not know thee, Lord, exchange time for eternity, perhaps never heard of the name of the person and the work and the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Lord, our hearts go out to these people in Haiti, those that suffered the loss of loved one and all their possessions. We thank you, Lord, for sparing the Crull family and all the other workers of Mission Aviation fellowship and the planes. We do pray, Lord, that all relief agencies that are moving toward this place far away from us may be equipped, well*

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 18:1-14.

*equipped to help the people, but especially, Lord, to commend them to thee those Christian relief organizations that not only they would minister to physical needs, but to spiritual needs above all, that thy name would be lifted up, that many sinners may be drawn out of darkness into thy marvelous light.*

*And, Lord, grant that also to us for those that do not yet know thee that stand afar off as that publican and think, perhaps, because they are such great sinners there is no hope for them. But, Lord, grant them to see what this publican was privileged to see, that not only they would see their need, their great misery and sinfulness, but that may see also the Savior. Show us our sin, Lord, and show us the Savior of sinners, the Lord Jesus for the first time or afresh. Oh, gather with us, Lord, in thy house, now, tonight as we hear thy Word as thou will give it, but also this coming sabbath day when not only we will hear the Word preached, but that we may see him, Lord, also in the broken bread and the poured forth wine, that we may see his broken body and his shed blood, that there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. Oh, that we may see Jesus, Lord, even tonight with the eye of our soul, with the eye of faith, with the eye of an enlightened understanding, that we may taste and see that thou art good, that we may have fellowship with thee in the Spirit and with each other, that the mind and the Spirit of the Lord Jesus might fill our hearts and our lives and that thou would be in our midst.*

*We pray, Lord, for all those who do look forward to this day through communion with thee, that have their hearts filled with gratitude and desire to confess the Lord's death till he comes. Oh, that their faith may grow strong, Lord, and that their joy may increase, joy unspeakable and a peace that passes all understanding, that it may fill our hearts, Lord, with anticipation and that thou would dwell with us, sup with us. Oh, Lord, that we may see that thy desire to sup with us is greater than all our desires combined, that we may see thy willingness and thy readiness to save sinners.*

*Bless also children and young people tonight and this coming sabbath day all those who do not have a church right, but in their hearts do love the Lord Jesus and hate sin and flee it and confess it and fight against it, put their trust in the Lord Jesus that they may taste something of it in anticipation of the day that they may also have a church right through confession of faith and be partakers of that love meal.*

*Bless us, oh, Lord. Open thy Word. Open our hearts. Send down thy Spirit that we may hear thy voice, that we may see thee, that we would see or hear no man save Jesus only. Bless those that are in their homes that have lawful reasons that cannot be with us tonight or, perhaps, other reasons, maybe even not interested, Lord. Grant blessings, undeserved blessings to those that listen on the church phone and, perhaps, on the internet, that thy Word may go forth, conquering and to conquer for thy glory, for our salvation. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

We will sing together from Psalter 110 all stanzas while your offerings will be received. The first offering is for the general fund. Second, later in the service will be for the inheritance publishers. 110. "Thy tender mercies, oh, my Lord, withhold not, I implore," 110.

[singing]

Dear congregation, with God's help we wish to consider tonight who is a true communicant, a true and worthy partaker of holy communion, the Lord's supper. I wish to do that by way of looking at how such a person prays, how he comes to God. We wish to do that from the word of our text, Luke 18 verse 13. And in context, just these words of Luke 18 verse 13. "God be merciful to me a sinner."<sup>4</sup>

We see here a true communicant's prayer. In the first place we will see a pressing need; secondly a plain confession and, thirdly, a profound effect. A true communicant's prayer, a pressing need, a plain confession and a profound effect.

Of course, there is always a pressing need to examine ourselves and our prayer lives for we live in the presence of a holy God whom we do not see, but of whom we know he is present with us always and we have sinned and have come short of the glory of God.

But though that pressing need is always there it needs examination, particularly so in a week of preparation for the Lord's supper. The Lord Jesus is speaking in this parable about a publican at the temple. And that is an unusual sight. Publicans weren't found in the temple. They had broken with many, if not all forms of religion. They were despised tax collectors, traitors. They were shunned by other Jews.

But obviously this publican was different and, of course, we know it is a parable, but it is certainly a realistic story. It could have taken place at any time, a publican pressed with great need. His whole behavior shows it. He has come through the temple, but we read that he hardly dares to raise his eyes. He stands in the back of the temple. We read that he stood afar off, verse 13, wouldn't lift up so much as his eyes to heaven. He was agitated. He was emotional. He was smiting continually, really in the original, on his breast. It was a continual display of agitation. It was a sign that something weighs him down greatly and it is evident that it is his sin.

"God be merciful to me a sinner."<sup>5</sup>

"Pardon my iniquity," that is his prayer.

But before we look into what he is praying, we need to consider the context and the context is that there are two parables. The Lord Jesus is telling two parables which, in a way, form a unit. And they give us an important lesson about prayer, a two fold lesson showing how prayer is a pressing need, indeed, really in the life of every believer, every true communicant.

I could not think of partaking in the Lord's supper if such a pressing need is not found in our lives, if it is not a reality.

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 18:13.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

The Lord Jesus evidently spoke this parable and the second one, as well, to teach us this, to pray. We read in the first verse of chapter 18, “He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint,”<sup>6</sup> not to give up, not to grow weary.

To illustrate the point, the Lord Jesus comes with this simple story about a widow who was in great need, was dealt unfairly, unjustly and now she goes to this judge and she keeps coming, a pressing need, indeed, but he wouldn’t help her.

So finally he does change his mind, not necessarily because he wants to help her so much, but just to be rid of her. It is very evident from the words that are being used.

And then the Lord Jesus puts this unjust judge in contrast, striking contrast with this just God, his heavenly Father.

Verse seven.

“And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?”<sup>7</sup>

In other words, if this unjust judge acts justly, how much more will God my heavenly Father do that to his very own elect, the ones whom he loved from all eternity?

But, perhaps that is your question.

How do I know if I am one of the elect? Who are those?

Isn’t it striking what a simple and low standard the Lord Jesus uses to identify the elect. It says in the Word, “Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him?”<sup>8</sup>

Why these elect are those that cry by day and by night unto God for mercy.

You see, they don’t cry because they know and feel they are elect. Often it is just the opposite, isn’t it? And you cry in deep need. You do not cry because you are elect, but often perhaps, certainly in the beginning of spiritual awakening because you feel you are not elect. You are lost. Certainly if you would go by circumstances sometimes or by your feelings, certain experiences you go through. Maybe you think the Lord has forsaken you, but here the Lord Jesus places this very low and lowly mark before his elect are. It is the first characteristic, it is the first mark of being of the elect of God, moved by the Spirit to cry for God, a pressing need without ceasing.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 18:1.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 17:7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Dear congregation, you and I, we all have that need. But are you aware of it? Do you feel that need to cry to God by day and by night and do you cry? Are you pressed by this need that you see portrayed in this parable, in these two parables? Are you praying always?

“Men ought always to pray and not to faint,”<sup>9</sup> not to give up. Not to give up hope.

Now that doesn't mean, of course, that we should always be praying and neglect our work. We should be working and praying. We must not be careless about our daily calling. I am not asking if you pray often enough, if you pray well enough.

If you would be a true believer and a true communicant, you would never be satisfied with your prayers. God forbid you would. You would only be satisfied with the salvation that God offers in his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. You would only be satisfied with him and with him alone, never with yourself, never with your prayers, never with how much you pray or how fervently you pray or how well you pray.

Prayer certainly has become natural to you, habitual to you, perhaps as habitual as breathing. You have your set times to pray, but also throughout the day praying without ceasing means you go to bed and you pray. When you wake up in the night you pray. When you wake up in the morning you pray. When you drive to work you pray. When you are working you pray. On and off. Comes to you more than once throughout the day, praying without ceasing.

It is your pressing need to call on the Lord. You need him. You just can't live without him.

You see the picture in this parable and maybe you say, “I do, indeed, feel the need to pray and I pray by day and by night, but it doesn't seem to work for me. I receive, it seems, no answer. I am indeed about to faint. I am about to give up.”

Dear congregation and dear friend, if this is, indeed, where you are at, if you have given up hope, whether you feel that you have never come rightly to the Lord or whether you have a time of darkness in your life, whether you think that the Lord is far away, remember the importunate widow here. She did not give up even though she had nothing to plead on. There was nothing in the judge that gave her any hope. There was nothing that she could bring to this judge that would give her hope and we have so much.

Not only the Word of the Lord Jesus that God will avenge such people that cry by day and by night to him, but we have the entire Bible full of precious promises that God will hear the needy when they cry.

You see, dear friend, it is a good sign if you feel your need for prayer. So many don't. They go from one day to the next without prayer, without feeling the need to pray without, perhaps, if they do pray maybe they pray for a blessing for their daily

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 18:1

occupation, for the work at home or at school or at work, wherever it may be, but not the need that we find in this passage.

The question is: what do you pray when you pray? How do you pray? What do you say? What is a true communicant's prayer?

You see, from the widow we learn that she persevered in prayer. She did not take a no for an answer while she had absolutely nothing to expect a yes.

But from the publican we learn what to pray.

And that brings us to our second point. In the first place we see the pressing need, in the second place a plain confession, a simple confession.

Even a child, a young child can understand this.

What does he pray, the publican?

“God be merciful to me a sinner.”<sup>10</sup>

“Forgive me my sins. Pardon my sins. Remove them, Lord, forgive them. Wash me clean.”

There is only one thing on this publican's mind and it is the one thing needful fueled by that pressing need of realizing that he is a sinner. One thing needful, indeed, but it consists of two powerful truths; one that he knows to be a miserable sinner. But, second, that he hopes for mercy. He hopes in the mercy of God. That is why he came. That is why he came to church. That is why, perhaps, you, too, came to church.

I trust that you, too, came with a pressing need and not only aware of your need, but coming to church, hearing the Word of God, hoping that there is mercy even for you, too.

The publican is ashamed because of his sins. He is standing afar off. He hardly dares to come into the holy presence of God, but he doesn't dare stay away either. He stands afar off, but he is still in the temple.

What makes this prayer a true prayer? Because it is a plain and honest confession, a simple acknowledgement of truth. Confession before God. You know that the word confess, two parts meaning with speaking, speaking with, speaking in agreement, agreeing with God. And we confess to God, we agree with God about ourselves, but also about him. We believe that we are what we are as revealed in the Word of God and convicted by the Spirit of God. But we also believe by the very same Spirit that the truth as it is in Christ Jesus offers free and full pardon of sin.

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<sup>10</sup> Luke 18:13.

You see, when we believe that we are sinners, we believe we are guilty. We believe we are polluted. We believe we are unrighteous and unholy. But if you know, too, that it is to be found with God, entirely with him.

As we find it also in Psalm 130 where the psalmist pleads with God, “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”<sup>11</sup>

That is the one side of the coin. The other, “But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”<sup>12</sup>

Do you know something of this, dear congregation, something of it? I am not saying do you understand it all, but do you know something of it as coming to a holy God as an unholy person, as an unrighteous one to come to the righteous one, not to be condemned by God’s righteousness, but be saved by it and find salvation in him?

You see, this is a true communicant’s prayer, persevering, not giving up and praying, “God be merciful to me a sinner,”<sup>13</sup> hoping against hope, hoping not in ourself, but in him.

You see what a contrast that is with the Pharisee because he prayed within himself. He trusted in himself. That is why the Lord Jesus introduces the second one.

“He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.”<sup>14</sup>

The Pharisee, he prayed all his life. He prayed many times, long prayers. And then the hated publican likely never prayed before.

Dear congregation, examine yourself. Who are you like? Be honest before God?

You all came tonight to church to hear the Word of God, to pray. Well, what do we pray? The Pharisee stood. It says, literally, “took a stand, took a place of prominence.” What a contrast to that publican who stood in the back.

The Pharisee, it says, “Prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.”<sup>15</sup>

He prayed, it says. Literally he kept on praying. He continued prayer. He seems to be the one that is praying always.

Well, what does he pray? Or, perhaps you should ask: Is he really praying?

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<sup>11</sup> Psalm 130:3.

<sup>12</sup> Psalm 130:4.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 18:13.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 18:9.

<sup>15</sup> Luke 18:11.

It is very clear that he is not praying at all. He is just talking to himself and he is very pleased with himself. He is filled with himself. He is blinded with pride and self righteousness. He doesn't even realize that he is in God's holy presence thinking that he is somehow acceptable because of who he is and what he has done and how he is praying, thinking that God would be as pleased with him as he is with himself. No pressing need at all. No cry to God to be avenged from his adversaries. He hasn't any. He doesn't cry to God for help for forgiveness. He is not asking the Lord to help him to battle sin.

In fact, he even thinks he has a surplus of good deeds and he lifts himself up, he praises himself for doing more than the law required of him. Because we read that he says not only that he is not like other men are, but he says, "I fast twice in the week."<sup>16</sup> That is not even required. Fasting was only required where there were special needs. It wasn't a set thing that had to be done twice a week. A self imposed...

He says, also, "I give tithes of all that I possess."<sup>17</sup>

The Lord did not require and doesn't require that we should possess of what we possess, but of what we have as increase, of our income. And to crown his folly and his offensive behavior he thanks God he is not like this publican.

It didn't enter into this man's mind that such a sinner can be accepted into God's favor the very first time he repents and every single time he repents. This man is more acceptable to God than he is.

You see, the Pharisee—even though it is in a parable, but that was typical of the Pharisees in those days—had come to this highly exalted position. After a lifetime of laboring, working himself up to a position of acceptance...

Dear congregation, tonight and also this coming Lord's Day there is really only two kinds of people in the church. Of course there is only one kind in the fact that they are all sinners. But two kinds, one perseveres in the way of self righteousness and the other having been exposed to what they really are come as sinners, as publicans and are not going to elevate ourselves above the publican nor above the Pharisee. If the Lord would leave us to ourselves we would do the very same thing and perhaps you still do.

Are you a publican, crying to God, "Be merciful to me a sinner"?<sup>18</sup> Or are you a Pharisee thinking that somehow through all you have done or not done you have come quite a way, but not yet quite there.

Do you seek righteousness in yourself or do you seek it in the Lord Jesus?

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<sup>16</sup> Luke 18:12.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Luke 18:13.

There is no third category. There is not really a third group of people although we would desperately want it, perhaps. There is only those who flee to God and persevere in it and cry out for mercy or those that can live without it, can live without him.

We find our righteousness in ourselves. We stay away from Jesus or we find it in him and find it in him sufficiently.

May the Lord keep us from acting like a Pharisee and from persevering in it. Be careful that we do not imitate it even denouncing sinners that might come forward this coming sabbath day maybe for the first time, perhaps then, God forbid, you would think, "How can this person come? He or she is a sinner. How can he or she come to the Lord's Table?"

You don't know what goes on in the heart and how much that sinner grieves over sin and trusts the Lord Jesus having sought and found salvation outside of self in him.

Oh, "God, be merciful to me a sinner."<sup>19</sup>

But maybe ask, "Is that really enough to come like that to the table of the Lord pleading for mercy? Is it enough?"

If so, you cry by day and by night unto God. If so, you pray, "God, be merciful to me a sinner."<sup>20</sup> That you may partake of the Lord's supper. For this is a true communicant's prayer.

And how do we know that? Well, the Lord Jesus himself confirms it as he confirmed who the elect are that cry by day and by night, so he confirms that those who come and pray, "God, be merciful to me a sinner,"<sup>21</sup> go home justified.

Jesus says, verse 14, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."<sup>22</sup>

And that brings us to our third point, a profound effect.

We will sing first from 94, one, three and four. "Thy mercy and thy truth, oh Lord, transcend the lofty sky what follows." Ninety-four, one, three and four.

[singing]

We see a profound effect. We don't know what went on in the heart and mind of the publican. It may well be that he went home all the way smiting on his breast still. But the account of Jesus, the Word of God is that he went home justified. What a lesson that is

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<sup>19</sup> Luke 18:13.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Luke 18:14.

for us, dear believing sinners. When we confess our sin, when we abhor ourselves in dust and ashes the Word of God must trump our feelings. We may not feel we are justified. But we must believe we are having confessed our sin.

It is an amazing thing where we struggle with many times when we see so much sin within, then to think that God will see nothing but sin within us, too, but that we put our trust in the Lord Jesus. We are covered with his righteousness. And God the Father sees his Son.

You see that was the view of the publican when he was praying at the temple. He saw his great sinfulness, but he also saw God's great forgiveness. How did he see that? Well he went to the temple looking to the sacrifices. That is when.... and why the Jews went to the temple to bring sacrifices, to see the fire consume not the worshipper, but the sacrifice, the substitute. He knew that the blood of animals couldn't wash him clean, but the blood of Jesus the Lamb of God would carry away his sin. And we, of course, see far more than needed at that time. Jesus still had to die.

So it is with all of that acknowledged that they are totally corrupt in themselves, fountains of sin. But then they take refuge through the fountain that is open for sin and uncleanness. They will all go home justified.

We can have no clearer view of God forgiving sin than to see what Christ accomplished on the cross on Golgotha. And we know that our cry to God, "God, be merciful to me a sinner,"<sup>23</sup> comes from our lips only because Jesus cried out first, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"<sup>24</sup>

That is why we will not be forsaken of him. That is why we will be accepted with God.

You see, the publican believed his misery, his sinfulness. He confessed it and he went home justified. And it is enough.

And Jesus cried before he died, "It is finished."<sup>25</sup> "It is sufficient. It is enough. All that take refuge to me shall be saved, pardoned, forgiven."

He went home justified rather than the other. The other who exalted himself was abased. The publican humbled himself and was exalted.

But maybe you still ask, "Is it really enough? Isn't a true believer, a true communicant, have to learn much more?"

Absolutely. But never at the expense of this most basic lesson, to come for the first time and at the hundredth time and at the every single time as a sinner trusting in the righteousness of Christ.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.

<sup>25</sup> John 19:30.

Actually it says, “God be merciful to me [the] sinner.”<sup>26</sup> The sinner coming to the Savior. It is enough.

All those who look to Christ for this shall receive the desire of his heart. More is not needed and less will not do.

There is a third mark, taking refuge to Christ, not only persevering in prayer and crying out for mercy, but fleeing to Christ. If there is another mark of the elect, not only that they cry by day and by night, but that they flee to Christ.

“All that the Father giveth me,” we read in John 6:37, “shall come unto me.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, all the elect shall come to Christ. And then Jesus says, “And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, you shall be justified. It is enough.

You see, the more you learn about yourself, dear believer, and about God, the more you will become the chief sinner indeed in your own estimation. But it will not keep you from God.

You do as Paul in Romans 7:24-25. “O wretched man that I am!”<sup>29</sup> He didn’t say, “That I was.” He never graduated above and beyond to be a sinner.

“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”<sup>30</sup>

But he goes on to say, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>31</sup>

Two sides of the same coin, seeing ourselves as a sinner, increasingly so. If initially our sins are exposed and cause us to flee to Christ more and more our sinfulness is being exposed, the root of the matter, our hearts perceived as fountains of iniquity. That is not less, but all the more causes us to flee to Christ and lean on him and put our trust in him and see and seek nothing but him.

It is enough.

Perhaps you say, “I prayed this so long already and I see nothing but sin and unrighteousness in myself.”

Well, so did the publican. So did Paul. God forbid that you would find no more sin and iniquity in yourself. Then you would be back to the Pharisee.

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<sup>26</sup> Luke 18:13.

<sup>27</sup> John 6:37.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Romans 7:24.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Romans 7:25.

Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to save sinners from their sins.

You see, that is why we turn to Jesus. That is why we lay hold on him and his righteousness. That is why we refuse to give up. And that is why we continue to pray, “God be merciful to me [the] sinner.”<sup>32</sup> For the more we see of our sins the more we become the sinner before God.

Chief of sinners. We cannot stay away from the Lord Jesus. Just like the disciples when Jesus asked them, “Will you go away from me?”

And they say, “To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”<sup>33</sup> “Thou hast the power of life.”

Of course, your sins are great. That is why you go to the Lord with them.

David prays in Psalm 25:11, “For thy name’s sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great.”<sup>34</sup>

The greater we perceive our sin is, our sins to be, the more urgency we feel to go to the Lord with them. Without feeling that we wouldn’t come. We would be equally welcome, but not pressed to go there.

So when we feel much of our sins and shortcomings, especially when in a week of preparation for the Lord’s supper the more we look outside of self to him.

You see, even at best, even the one among us who sees most of his or her sin in self is the only the tip of the iceberg. It is far worse than we can ever imagine. It is far worse than you ever will know.

Will you sink away in hell forever if you do not repent? It will be a bottomless pit. Or whether by grace, having trusted Christ in heaven? You will still not see the depths of sinfulness or the height of salvation?

So do not wait for great impression or for more views of your sinfulness. Flee to Christ with what you have and with what you don’t have and with empty hands. More conviction of your sin will not make you more acceptable to the Lord Jesus than you are right now. There is nothing you can do or need to do to be received in the favor of God. God has done all. It is all done already by Christ, through Christ and now preached through Christ, lifted up the cross, lifted up in the proclamation.

That is why Paul says he determined not to know anything save Jesus Christ and him crucified. All done in the bleeding death of the Son of God. Provision for the worst of

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<sup>32</sup> Luke 18:13.

<sup>33</sup> John 6:66.

<sup>34</sup> Psalm 25:11.

sinners, for the oldest is the glorious message of this passage. It is the amazing grace displayed, confirmed in the setting up of the Lord's table, the death of the Son of God is displayed in a visible way. The breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine the Lord confirms that there is forgiveness with God that he may be feared.

Do not despise the day of small things. Don't consider them small things. If you persevere to come, if Jesus of the elect says that they cry by day and by night, that they persevere in it, that they pray God be merciful to me a sinner, that they take refuge to the Lord Jesus, his Son. Are those small things?

That is why we celebrate the Lord's supper this coming Sunday that there would be none in our midst that could say the qualifications are too high. It is too difficult.

This passage shows us it is simple. A child can understand it.

And who do we think will rejoice the most in this forgiveness? He who has been forgiven much, who cries by day and night, "God, be merciful to me a sinner."<sup>35</sup> Amen.

*Blessed triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, take this message to our hearts that we may meditate upon it and even now, even while we are still in the house of God before these threatening thoughts come, we may do what the publican did. He didn't first go home, but right there in the house of God he confessed his sin. Oh, that there be none here tonight that would leave this place without crying within, "God be merciful to me a sinner." On thy grace, I rest my plea, on that plenteous redemption and forgiveness may be received, that we, too, even tonight may go home justified all for the sake of Christ, what he has done, what he still is doing at the right hand, at thy right hand, Lord, and also what that... if thou would spare us, will do this coming sabbath day, that weak faith may be strengthened and that a people may be established and rejoice. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.*

We will sing together in closing 71, one, three and five. "Jehovah is my light and my salvation near." Seventy-one, one, three and five.

[singing]

Receive the blessing of the Lord and go home in peace.

The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.<sup>36</sup>

Amen.

[music]

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Numbers 6:24-26.