

## THE SINNER'S PLEA

By Henry T. Mahan

**Luke 18:13;** *“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.”*

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Many, many years ago, a great and famous hymn writer wrote this hymn. Here's the first verse:

I need thee precious Jesus,  
For I am full of sin.  
My soul is dark and guilty,  
My heart is dead within.  
I need that cleansing fountain,  
Where I can always flee.  
The blood of Christ most precious,  
The sinner's perfect plea.

That's my subject today, (**THE SINNER'S PLEA**). What can a sinner plea? Does a sinner have a plea? Will God hear a sinner when he pleads? Yes sir! I'm going to address that subject, "The Sinner's Plea." I'm going to tell you what a sinner can plead before God and be heard.

But, **first** of all, I must find a sinner. Is there, in this congregation today, a real, genuine, self-confessed, guilty sinner? Is there a sinner listening to my voice? Now, most people do not believe they are sinners; in fact, most people are offended when you call them sinners. Another great hymn writer said this, "A sinner is a sacred thing, the Holy Ghost has made him so." The Apostle Paul said, "*Let every mouth be stopped and all the world become guilty before God.*" There are not many people who will admit to being a sinner, a genuine, guilty sinner before God. But, this message will have no meaning to you, if you are not a sinner, because Paul clearly stated that, "*the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, (and he added), of whom I am the chief.*"

One day, our Lord was eating with a group of sinners. People who were recognized and known to be sinners, (publicans and sinners). The religious Pharisees observed Him eating with these sinners and they asked His disciples, "*Why does your Master eat with Publicans and sinners?*" The Lord Jesus heard them and knew what they were saying, and He turned

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to them and said, *"The well do not need a physician, but they that are sick. I'm not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Now, you go learn what that means."* Have you learned what that means? Are you a sinner? If I'm going to deal with the subject of the sinner's plea, then the first thing I have to find is a sinner. Are you a sinner?

The **second** thing is this, that sinner has to realize that there is a problem between him and God. Now, he's got to be convinced of that, that he has trouble. He doesn't have trouble with other sinners, because we're all just alike. We're born of the same father, Adam. We're born of the same problems, sin. We all live alike and think alike, talk alike and walk alike, but there is a problem between God and us. This man has to recognize that. He's got to realize that the greater guilt and the greater condemnation of his sin is actually his separation from God, and his inability to please God. We are without Christ, without hope and without God in this world. We are without God!

You see, when I find a sinner, I'll find a man who realizes his sin has separated him and God, that God is at war with him, and he with God. *"In the flesh, no man can please God."* We find out as Isaiah said, *"Our righteousness is filthy rags in God's sight."* What is pleasing and well pleasing to men is an abomination to God. If I'm truly a sinner, and I am, whether I admit it or not, I can't plead my merit, because I don't have any. I can't plead my righteousness because I don't have any. My righteousness is filthy rags. I can't plead my good deeds, because I don't have any. *"By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified."* David said, *"Man at his best state is altogether vanity."* Our God is altogether lovely, and we're all together unlovely. Just like our God is altogether Holy, and altogether Righteous, we're all together unclean.

I want to introduce you to the four nuns. Have you ever met the four nuns? Everybody needs to meet the four nuns. Everybody would do well to remember the four nuns. They are found in **Romans Chapter 3**, the four nuns. You'll remember this by the way that I'm saying it. Listen to me, **Romans 3:10** says, *"There's (none) righteous, no not one."* That's the first one, *"none righteous."* Secondly, *"There's (none) that understandeth."* We don't understand, we call bitter sweet and sweet, bitter. We call good evil and we call evil good. We don't understand the mysteries of God. The third nun is, *"There is (none) that seek after God."* None, that seeks after God! The natural man seeks his way, not God's way. *"We've all sinned and turned to our own way."* The fourth nun is, *"There is (none) that doeth good, no not one."* *"There's none righteous, none that understandeth, none that seek God, and none that doeth good."* Do you understand that? Ever found a sinner? Have I found a bonified, genuine, guilty sinner who has a problem? His sins have separated him from God. By his own ability, he cannot in the flesh, please God. Nothing we do is pleasing to God, even the plowing of the wicked, is an abomination to God.

The **third** thing is, you'll find that the promises of God are inseparably joined to a need. The promise of rest is made to those that need it. The promise of forgiveness is made and held out to sinners, the guilty people. You can only forgive a guilty man. The promise of mercy is for the miserable; grace is for the guilty. The promise of salvation is for sinners.

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Christ died for sinners. Listen to these promises, “*Come let us reason together, thou your sins be as scarlet, I’ll make them white as snow.*” Are your sins scarlet; are they red like crimson? They are not? Then, I won’t make them white as snow. The promise is held out to the needy. Listen to this promise, “*Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.*” Are you laboring, heavy-laden with sin? No? Then there is no promise made to those people. The promise made is addressed to a need. “*Weary and heavy laden, I’ll give you rest.*”

Listen to **Romans 5**, “*For when we were without strength, (weak and powerless), Christ died for the ungodly.*” Are you without strength? Are you ungodly? Heaven’s no! Well, Christ didn’t die for you. He died for the ungodly. “*God commended His love toward us that while we were yet enemies, Christ died for us.*” This is the promise; can you understand this? I’m talking about the plea, the sinner’s plea. It’s the sinner’s plea and it’s the sinner’s plea for mercy, the miserable sinner. “*Out of the depths have I cried.*” If you’re not a sinner and your sins aren’t great and your sins haven’t separated you from God and your sins haven’t rendered you incapable and unable to please God, why do you need any mercy? Then, if you realize that grace is for the guilty and salvation is for sinners,

Charles Wesley wrote this. Most of these great hymn writers couldn’t possibly find a home among us in our so-called worship today; we’re too good for them. Charles Wesley wrote this:

Depth of mercy can there be,  
Mercy there reserved for me.  
Can my God, His wrath forbear,  
And me the chief of sinners spare.

Oh my, if this be your situation, if I have discovered this morning, another sinner, (I’m one); I’m looking for another one so I can tell him the good news. Do you know what witnessing is? Witnessing is one beggar telling another beggar where he got something to eat. It’s one sinner telling another sinner where he found mercy. It’s one guilty man telling another guilty man where he found grace, that is witnessing and anything else is wasted time. If this is your situation, and you can say, “Preacher, you sure have found a sinner here, a guilty sinner who has a problem with God, who’s sins have separated him from God, then I’ve got good news for you. I’ve got a proclamation of pardon to the guilty, mercy for the miserable and life for the dead. That’s right!

I’ll show you what the sinner can plead. It’s **seven-fold**. The sinner has a seven-fold plea.

**Firstly**, if he wants to know God, if he deserves mercy and grace, he can plead his need. If you will go to the Bible, you will find all who came to our Lord while he was in His earthly ministry, His earthly pilgrimage, all who came to Him, came to Him because they needed Him. They had heard of Him and they believed on Him and they came to Him, but what brought them to Him, was a need. This Canaanite woman came, whose daughter was desperately ill, incurably ill. She came to our Lord and said, “*Lord, have mercy on me.*”

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He didn't answer a word. He never even replied. She didn't leave, she stood right there. She said, "*Lord have mercy upon me,*" and He said, "*I'm sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" She still didn't move. She said, "*Lord have mercy on me.*" He said, "*It's not right to give children's bread to dogs.*" She said, "*That's right, I'm a dog, (I'm a Gentile dog), but you're my master and dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.*" That's when our Lord said, "*Great is thy faith, be it unto thee as you desire.*" This woman had a need, and it kept her at His feet.

Bartimaeus sitting by the wayside, blind in darkness, in poverty and begging, had a need and he cried out of that need, "*Jesus thou Son of David have mercy on me.*" Our Lord stood still and called him to Him and said, "What do you want, and he said, "*That I may see.*" He's the only one who could meet Bartimaeus' need, and He's the only one who can meet my need.

I need righteousness, a holiness with which the Father will be well pleased. I don't have it; I need a Substitute. I need a Savior; I need someone to bear my sins in His body on a tree, I need a mediator, I need one to pray for me, to intercede for me, an advocate to stand between me and God and plead my cause, do you? I have a need that brings me to Christ.

**Secondly**, I can plead, not only my need, but I can plead His mercy. That's what the Publican set forth in the temple. Christ said, "*Two men went up to the temple to pray.*" One of them was very religious Pharisee; one of them was a sinner, a Publican. The very religious man stood before God, right down front, and he began to boast about what he was, whom he was, and what he had done. "*I'm not like other men, I fast twice a week, I tithe my income, I give alms to the poor. I'm not an adulterer, and I'm not an extortioner.*" Our God said he went home, down, condemned, and doomed in his own self-righteousness, but way in the back, there was a fellow that wouldn't so much lift his eyes to heaven, let alone his hands, but he smote on his chest and he cried, "*Oh God, be merciful to me the sinner.*" My Lord said, "*That man went to house forgiven and justified.*" He didn't plea his merit, like the Pharisee, or his good works, he pleaded one thing before God, he said, "*God be merciful to me the sinner.*" Be merciful, have mercy upon me.

David prayed that way. He said, "*Have mercy on me O God, according to your loving kindness, according to the multitude of your tender mercies.*" That's the basis of our plea, "*God be merciful.*" I don't want justice, do you? We want mercy. If we get justice, we'll be damned. The scripture said in **Psalm 130**, "*If our Lord shouldest mark iniquity, who could stand? But, there's forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*" John said, "*If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us.*" What's the sinner's plea? He pleads his need; I'm a sinner. He pleads God's mercy upon sinners.

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**Thirdly**, He can plead the right of Jesus Christ to show mercy to whom He will. My friends, God is not obligated to us. God is not obligated to forgive us. He's not obligated to pardon us. He's not obligated to show mercy to us; He doesn't owe us mercy; He owes us the wages of sin, we've earned that, it belongs to us. "*The wages of sin is death.*" That's what we've earned. "*But the gift of God is eternal life.*" He doesn't owe us any mercy.

Listen to that thief on the cross. First of all he acknowledged that Jesus Christ was God. He turned to his companion, who was also dying on a cross, and said, "*Don't you fear God? Don't you fear God seeing that you are in the same condemnation, this man is God, this is the Lord.*" He said secondly, that he acknowledged his sin. "*Seeing that we are in the same condemnation and we indeed, justly, we're getting the due rewards of our deeds;*" I'm getting what I deserve. If God Almighty is not pleased to save you or me, if He is pleased to pass us by, it'll be just exactly what we deserve. We're getting what we deserve.

Also, he talked about the Holiness of Christ. He said, "*This man has done nothing amiss.*" He looked at Christ, now listen to me, he said, "Lord you're not going to stay dead, you're coming into a kingdom." "*Remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" You're King, you have all authority, all power, all rights, and all privileges, will you think on me, remember me? So, this man, and his plea for the sinner was this, "*Lord you be merciful to me a sinner.*" Can you plead that? I'm a sinner; Jesus Christ is the God man. He has all power in heaven and in earth. He has all authority over all flesh. "*Lord, remember me.*"

All right, here's the **fourth**, now listen to me, I can plead my need, I can plead His mercy, I can plead His right to show mercy and then I can plead, listen carefully to this, I can plead the power and the ability of Christ because of who He is. It's because of His person, who He is, what He did, where He is now, that enables Him to do for us what we need to have done. Listen to **Hebrews 7:24**, "*This man because He continueth forever, hath an unchanging priesthood.*" This God-Man, because He continueth forever hath an unchanging priesthood, wherefore, "*He is able to save them that come to God by Him.*" Do you understand what I am saying? I'm saying that who Jesus Christ is, what He did, and where He is, gives Him the right and the power to exercise mercy or judgment, grace or condemnation. You see; "*He's able to do all that He promised.*" Abraham believed that. Abraham believed that God was able to do all that He promised. Jude said, "*He's able to keep us from falling.*" He's able because of who He is. This man because he hath an unchanging priesthood, because He continues forever, He is able to save. "*He's able to keep that which I have committed to Him, He's able to raise our vile bodies and make them like His.*"

One day, our Lord came down from the mountain, **Matthew Chapter 8**. When He came down from that mountain, the scripture says that a leper approached Him, an unclean leper approached Him. This man fell down and worshipped Christ and this is what he said, "*Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.*" I'm not preaching that Christ is trying to do anything, He's not trying; He wills what He wills to do. "*The Son will*

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*quicken whom he will.*” Moses said, *“Lord, show me your glory.”* He said, my glory is this, *“I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful, I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious.”* This leper said, *“Lord if you will, (it’s not if I will, or if anybody else will), if you will, you can make me clean.”* That’s my plea. I plead my need, I plead His mercy; *“He delights to show mercy.”* I plead His power and I plead His right to exercise that power and to show mercy to whom He will.

Now listen to this, **fifthly**: I plead His blood. Do you think Jesus Christ died on the cross in vain? Do you think He could possibly fail to accomplish what He came to do? The scripture says, *“If God spared not His own Son, how shall He not with Him, freely give us all thing?”* I believe the blood of Christ is sufficient and effectual to completely save us from all sin and condemnation, all for whom He died.

You know, the blood on the door in Egypt, delivered all who were under the blood. God said, *“When I see the blood, I’ll pass over you.”* Every house that the blood was on the door, God passed over, in mercy. In every house where there was no blood, death visited.” I’ll tell you that the blood of God’s Son is infinitely more sufficient, infinitely more effectual, infinitely more powerful to deliver than the blood of that Passover lamb in Egypt. *“The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanseth us from all sin.”* If Christ died for us, we’ll be redeemed.

Paul said, *“Who can lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It’s God that justifies. Who is he that condemneth? It’s Christ that died. Rather, is risen again, who is ascended to the right hand of God who ever lives to make intercession for us.”* “Payment God’s justice cannot twice demand, first at my bleeding surety’s hand, then again at mine.” I plead the merits of His blood. The blood is sufficient. The Passover lamb in Egypt is typical of Christ who is our Passover. They put the blood on the door; they went into the house and sat down. God passed through. *“When I see the blood, I will pass over you.”*

Here’s the **sixth** plea: The sinner can plead His command. Preacher, don’t you mean invitation? No, I mean command! The gospel is a command. *“God commands all men everywhere to repent.”* God doesn’t invite men to repent. Even the laws of our land don’t invite people to obey them; they command you to obey them upon penalty for disobeying. God doesn’t invite men to believe the gospel, He commands men to believe. Men ought to believe the gospel; there is no alternative. We either believe the gospel or we make God a liar.

I’ll tell you this, when the command comes to repent and believe, (with the command, comes the power). *“Matthew, follow me.”* He rose and followed Him. *“Zacchaeus come down.”* He came down. Lazareth, here’s a dead man, *“Lazareth come forth.”* With the command goes the power. Lazareth came forth, alive. There was a man with a withered hand; Christ said, *“Stretch forth your hand.”* He couldn’t, but he did. There was a man lying on a bed, afflicted for 38 years. Our Lord said, *“Take up your*

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*bed and walk.*” That’s a command, that’s not an invitation. With the command, came the power. “*Abraham get out of your father’s house;*” he left. All the way through the scripture, you find our Lord giving commands to people. And with the command, goes the power. “*Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power.*” When you hear this gospel, not just with these ears, but with this heart, and the gospel comes to you, not in Word only, but in power, life-giving power, you’ll respond.

**Last**, I can plead this, my compliance with His terms. “*Lord, what would you have me do?* Confess my sins, I do. Believe on Christ, I do. Trust Him, I do. Commit yourself to Him, I do. That’s the sinner’s plea. May God give us the grace to exercise the sinner’s plea!