

TOO GOOD TO BE SAVED!

NO. 2687

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, AUGUST 12, 1900.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JULY 17, 1881.

*"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."
Luke 18:14.*

THE publican was justified rather than the Pharisee. The outwardly worse man of the two was accepted rather than the one who was apparently better. "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other." Observe, dear Friends, our Savior's gentle way of describing the contrast between these two men. He says that the publican was "justified rather than the other," but we all know that behind this mild and lenient expression, there is the sad and solemn Truth of God that the Pharisee was not justified at all. It is concerning that fact that I am about to speak to you. The publican was justified and the Pharisee was not, yet our Lord only said, "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other." It will be true wisdom on our part, also, to sometimes state a Truth in the very mildest way possible. A Scriptural Doctrine loses nothing of its effect by being tenderly expressed—indeed, a forcible Truth of God may even have its force increased by being rather understated than overstated. Our Lord Jesus Christ knew when to use this holy art and He did so on this occasion and, therefore, you and I will be wise if we do the same when a fitting opportunity occurs.

Notice, further, dear Friends, that the pith, the marrow, the very center of the blessing that we expect to get in worship is justification. To be accepted of God, to be regarded as just, to be esteemed by Him as doing the right thing—this is what we ought to seek whenever we come together for worship! And in that sense the publican, with his earnest cry for mercy, was justified—that is, he was accepted by God, he was regarded as one who had been made just—while the Pharisee, who stood there ostentatiously publishing his own excellences, was not justified, was not accepted, was not considered a just man and did not receive from God any of the favors which He is accustomed to give to those who rightly worship Him in spirit and in truth.

The reason why the Pharisee did not receive that which is the end of all worship—namely, acceptance with God, and justification in His sight—was that he reckoned himself too good to be justified. According to his own opinion, he was altogether too righteous a man to need God's favor and mercy. And I want now to speak to any of you who think you are too good to be saved. I am always preaching to sinners and I have had the great delight of seeing many and many a sinner taken in the Gospel net and saved. Now I want to talk to those who are scarcely sinners except that, by way of compliment, they acknowledge that they are. "Yes," they say, "we are all sinners." And if they go to church, they say, "Lord, have mercy upon us miserable sinners." Yet, all the while, they neither look miserable, nor are they really conscious that they are sinners in the sight of God and *already under condemnation*. I want to speak especially to this class of persons. It is a great pity that it should be so, yet there are many people who, in their own estimation, are much too good to be saved, too good ever to be justified, too good ever to go to Heaven! There may be some such persons here. If so, may God the Holy Spirit bless to them what I have to say in Christ's name!

I. My first remark is that THERE ARE STILL SUCH PERSONS AS THIS PHARISEE.

There are still in the world many persons who, in their own opinion, are too good to be justified, too good to be saved. They come to this condition *because they compare themselves with others*. This Pharisee said, "God, I thank You that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." He felt himself to be quite a

saint compared with the publican. He went up many degrees in his own estimation when he thought of what a wicked extortioner that publican had been! And he remembered someone who had been an adulterer and another person who had been unjust—and contrasting himself with these people, he felt that he was the most respectable individual whom he knew—a man to be held in very high esteem! He felt that God ought to be *thanked* for making such a man and if nobody else would do it, he would do it himself, for that was a duty which ought to be discharged at once. So remarkable a specimen of human excellence ought not to be left on the face of the earth, ungratefully forgotten by men—and as many of them did seem to forget him and not to see his excellences, he would, himself, bless God that there was, at any rate, one person in the world who was all he ought to be, if not a little more! He reckoned himself to be so good because he compared himself with other men.

My dear Hearer, are you very good by the same sort of measurement? Are you superlatively excellent because you judge yourself by a similar standard? If so, let me ask you kindly to make use of that standard in another way by comparing yourself, not with those whom you regard as your inferiors, but with those whom you must acknowledge to be your superiors. You have surely read some biographies of really devout, earnest, holy, consecrated men whose lives much exceed yours in all that is of true worth. So, if you will look *up* instead of looking down, I think you will soon begin to say, “Ah, I am far short of their standard! I am nothing like those men were. I am not living such a careful, prayerful, watchful, self-denying, consecrated life as they lived.” Let this thought take a little of the conceit out of you. Begin to think that you are not quite so good as you thought you were and it may do you some service if you meditate for a while upon that fact.

“But,” you say, “we cannot all be expected to come up to *their* standard.” Ah, but you *are* expected to do that, and a great deal more, for, if you are going to be justified by your works, you will have to go far above their standard! The true standard by which you are to measure yourself is not even the most saintly of the saints, nor the most devoted of the martyrs and confessors. The standard for any man who would be saved by his own righteousness is God’s holy Law! Listen to it—“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Have you come anywhere near that standard? I am sure you have not. You have fallen far short of what God demands of you, so what does it matter though you say, “I am better than some people are”? You are evidently worse than others are and you are much worse—infinately worse—than you ought to be! And the perfect Law of God, if you are to be justified by it, requires a *perfect obedience to all its commands*—and that you can never render. O dear Sirs, you are laboring under a terrible mistake! You are, in your own judgment, superlatively good, but you come to that conclusion only by comparing yourselves among yourselves—a process which, as the Apostle Paul tells us, is “not wise.” Measure yourselves by the Law of God and you will shrink into nothing at once if you are a man of honor, wisdom and sense.

There are some who think themselves much too good to be justified by God and they are under that delusion *because they have set one duty above another*. Listen to this Pharisee’s boast—“I fast twice in the week.” Among the Pharisees of our Lord’s day, I believe that Monday and Thursday were the regular fast days. I have heard that among certain modern Pharisees, Friday is the appointed time for fasting, but that is a matter about which I do not know much. The Pharisee evidently felt that it was a most important thing to fast twice in the week—and then he added, “I give tithes of all that I possess.” There were certain tithes that were demanded by God’s Law, but he seems to imply that he did *more* than was required of him, for he gave tithes of *all* that he had coming in. I daresay that, like the rest of the Pharisees, he had tithed the “mint, and anise, and cumin”—probably, all together it did not amount to much, and in comparison with, “the weightier matters of the Law—judgment, mercy and faith”—which he had omitted, it was as nothing at all. But he was very careful to pay the tithe of his mint, anise and cumin.

That might have been to his credit if he had not set it up as being the chief and main thing to be put in the front, the choice article to be exhibited in the window to let everybody see what a remarkably excellent person he was! “I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” He did not say anything about the widows’ houses that he had devoured, nor about the pretense and hypocrisy that lurked behind his long prayers. He did not say anything about his pride and his contempt for his fellow men, which he even dared to express in what he called his prayers. No, but he brought certain other things to the front—out of all true proportion—and then he felt himself to be wonderfully good.

Well, now, we know some persons who are most regular in their attendance at a place of worship. Perhaps someone asks, “Is not that a good thing for me to do?” Yes, it is an excellent thing, but I do not say much about it if you give short weight in your shop, or if you tell lies in your home, or anywhere else, or if you are living an unchaste life. There are other things to be thought of besides going to a meeting on Sunday. “Oh, but we have been baptized and we take the communion.” Yes, I know you do and it is a very important thing that you should do so if you are a Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and if you are really living as true Believers should live. But if you put any religious *ceremony* to the front and omit the more vital matters, it will not do!

Then you know there are some persons who say, “Well, Sir, I was baptized as an infant, I was confirmed by the bishop, I have always attended the parish church, I give my guinea to every contribution, I have family prayer, I have—I hardly like to say how many good things I have.” Just so. That is the way with some people—they put a certain set of duties into the front, while other duties are neglected. And they bring to God one duty blood-red with the murder of another. There are some who have given to God what they have gained by lying and trickery in their business, or they have given to God what they have ground out of the bones and marrow of the poor. Is it not often so? But it is not to be expected that God will accept either ourselves or our offerings because we choose to put one set of external duties into the front and then say, “We are superlatively good.” It is a dreadful delusion! May God save you from it, my Friend, if you are under it! Remember the solemn words of the Lord Jesus upon this very point—“These ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

There are also some persons who reckon themselves to be very good *because they conceive themselves to have done almost more than they ought*. There is one family of the “Good-Enoughs” and there is another family of the “Too-Goods.” They are cousins, I believe. Certainly, they are very closely related. This Pharisee belonged to the family of the “Too-Goods.” I have already reminded you that he said, “I fast twice in the week.” Now, according to the law of the Jews, they were to fast *once in the year*—so this man gave a hundred days for one, for he fasted twice in the week. They were to give a tithe of the produce of their land, but he did more than that. He said, “I give tithes of all that I possess. Surely, there is a balance to my credit. If I do fall short anywhere, I have gone over the mark in some other things and have done more than was required of me.”

Alas, it is often the characteristic of hypocrites that they overdo one part and underdo another! Remember that striking simile in Hosea 7:8—“Ephraim is a cake not turned.” What happens to a cake that is not turned? Why, it is done too much on one side and it is not done at all on the other! It is burnt black upon the coals on one side and the other side is dough just as it was when it was put down to bake! How many there are who always keep looking at their burnt side! “Oh,” they cry, “we are baked and more than baked.” Yes, but look at the other side of you, which God also sees—there, you are underdone. Oh, that we might have sense enough to look at ourselves in a true light and to see the whole of ourselves—for then our foolish self-righteousness would soon vanish!

Let me speak to these very good people a little longer. This Pharisee, though he was so very good in his own esteem—could not be justified *because he did not pray*. Someone asks, perhaps, “Did he not pray?” No. He went up to the Temple to pray, but he did not pray. There was not a word of prayer in all that he said. And you, my Friend, may have knelt down every morning and every evening since you were a child, and yet never have prayed, for prayer is the speaking of a poverty-stricken heart to a rich God—the actual asking of something from God—but you have not felt that you needed anything from Him, so you have not asked for it! You have never cried out of your heart unto the Lord. You have uttered a certain form of words and that has been the end of it. You may say your prayers everyday till you die and yet never have prayed at all. How could this Pharisee expect that he should be saved when he had never prayed?

And, next, *he did not love his fellow men*. And it is a rule with God that if we love not our fellows, we shall not have their love. If we forgive not our erring brother, neither will the Lord forgive us. This Pharisee did not love his brother—he put all the rest of mankind into one bundle and he said, “God, I thank you that I am not as other men”—the whole lot of them. He himself stood there alone—he was the one man for whom God was to be thanked! He did not love his fellows, or else he would have thought better of them and he would not have put them all down as unworthy to be associated with himself, nor would he have set himself up above them all. Specially, he did not love that publican. He was horrified to find him standing so near him and he uttered, even in the House of God, a contemptuous expression concerning

his fellow sinner. How could God send a man home justified when he was unloving and without sympathy for his fellow man?

Notice, also, that *this Pharisee did not ask for mercy*. Look again at his pretended prayer. There is not anything in it concerning mercy. He said, “God, I thank you,” but he did not cry, “Give me mercy. Grant me forgiveness. Pardon all my transgressions against you.” There was not a word of petition or supplication—then how should God give the man that which *he never asked for*? How should He bestow justification on one who never sought it?

Perhaps the most fatal flaw of all was that *there was no reference to an atonement in his devotion*. He said, “God, I thank You that I am not as other men are,” but there was no plea that the atonement offered on the altar might avail for him. Yet, deep down in the poor publican’s prayer, there lies an allusion to the Propitiation or Mercy Seat. The penitent cry, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” has in it the veiled thought of the great propitiatory Sacrifice! But how shall God hear the prayer of the man who does not plead the blood of Jesus, nor make any mention of His great Sacrifice for sin? The Pharisee was altogether too good in his own esteem, so he was not justified. I wonder whether there are any such people here?

II. Secondly and but briefly, let me say concerning such persons as this Pharisee, that **THEY CANNOT BE JUSTIFIED**.

I can support my statement by the following reasons. First, *for God to justify them would be to dishonor Himself by putting Himself in the place of a debtor to them*—and that can never be the case. This man as good as pleaded, if he pleaded at all, that God should accept and justify him because he had not done certain things, but he had done other things—therefore God was, as it were, indebted to him for his extraordinary excellence! But Man, Woman, do you think that God will ever be debtor to *you*? Will you dare to stand before your Maker and talk to Him as if you had some merits of your own which deserved commendation from Him? Probably you would not say that in so many words, but there are many who are practically saying as much as that. They kick against the Doctrine of Election, for instance. They say that for God to save one person, and not another, is wrong, for they have as much claim upon Him as others have—which is true, for they have no claim at all, just as others have none at all! Yet their very opposition to God’s exercise of His Sovereign rights proves that, deep down in their hearts, they believe they have some claim upon Him and that God is, in some sense, their debtor. But, dear Friends, you can never be justified while you talk or act in such a way as that! God will freely give Heaven, itself, away! He will give His own Son as the free gift of His Grace, but He will have no dealings with you if you think you have any claims upon Him. Claims upon Him? Wretches who deserved, long ago, to have been cast into Hell—how can you talk about your own merits when you appear before the infinitely holy God?

Further, God cannot justify these self-righteous people *because, if He did, it would be as good as saying that Christ’s Atonement was not necessary*. If you can go to Heaven by your own works, why did Christ die? If you can get there by fasting, prayer, religious observances and moralities, then yonder Cross with Christ upon it was a superfluity and a mistake! There was no need for any plan of salvation and no need of an atonement by blood, if, after all, men might be good enough to save themselves! But we know that there is no salvation apart from Christ’s atoning Sacrifice, so God cannot justify the self-righteous when, in order to do so, He would have to cast a slur upon His own wisdom and upon His own well-beloved Son. You good people, you who are too good to be saved—I mean, too good in your own esteem—you cannot be justified!

Further, if God were to justify those who are like this Pharisee was, He would be *either making two ways to Heaven or else shutting sinners out*. You see, dear Friends, God must shut the sinners out if the door into Heaven is only for the good, or else He must make a special entrance for the gentlefolk—a little private door where qualified people can go in by presenting tickets describing their own merits. But, if that were to be the case, we would have to get the Bible altered, for this blessed Book tells us that there is only one way of salvation and the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, says that He is the Way. The Bible says that there is only one foundation and that “other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” The Apostle Peter, speaking to the rulers and elders of Israel, said, “This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

Suppose that sinners are to be saved partly by works and partly by Grace? Then what is to become of those who have no good works to plead? Shall they be lost? No, yet, if they are to be saved, they must be saved by Grace alone. Then

there must be two ways to save men—some by Grace—that is the way for sinners. Some by Grace and works—that is the way for respectable people like some of you. Then we should have two gates to Heaven and if two, why not twenty? And then, at last, it would come to this, that we might have twenty thousand different ways to Heaven! I have seen a book entitled, “Every Man’s Own Lawyer,” and we might in time have another book upon the subject, “Every Man His Own Savior.” That is what it would practically come to, at last, if there was more than one way of salvation! But it is not so and never shall be so. There is one way of salvation for all who come to God and that is by faith in Jesus Christ! And if you will not walk in this narrow way—if you are too good to travel along this pilgrim path—you shall perish in your accursed self-righteousness! Accursed, indeed, it is, for it has shut multitudes out of all hope of mercy because they have thought themselves too good to be saved!

If the self-righteous are to be saved, we must alter the Bible in other places besides those I have quoted. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” You must strike that passage out and so you must the reference to “Him that justifies the ungodly.” It must no longer be said, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered,” but we shall have to make David say, “Blessed is he who has never sinned at all, but whose merits deserve eternal life.” Poor David would have come off badly under such a rule!

You will also have to alter the Church as well as the Bible. I must go out and most of my Brothers and Sisters will have to go out, for we shall not be able to get along with such good people as you are! We have all been sinners and God has had mercy upon us—and we love Him much because He has forgiven us much—and when you self-righteous folk come in, you will not like to associate with us. And when we pray, “God be merciful to me, a sinner,” you will feel ashamed of us. Yet, mark you, the Church will not be altered in order to please you!

If it were, we would also have to alter many of our best hymns. We could not sing the hymns we have sung this evening. “Rock of Ages” also would have to go, for we should feel that Toplady made a mistake when he wrote it. And “Jesus, Lover of My Soul,” would have to follow it. If this is the right system—if the good people are to come to Christ with their own goodness and to be saved because they are so good—then what is to become of the whole of our Hymn-Book? Why, everything will be turned upside down! But mark this—the turning upside down will come in another way. It is you self-righteous ones who will be turned upside down! And if you will continue to be deluded and to believe a lie, you will have to suffer for it. I pray that God, in His mercy, may abase you now with true humility and lay you low at the feet of Jesus, for, if not, you will have to be abased at the coming of the Lord, in the Day when He shall judge all things according to Infallible Truth of God—and your fancied righteousness will then melt away like hoar-frost at the rising of the sun—and you will cry out in despair, “Woe is me! Woe is me! I thought myself good and excellent, but now I am cast out, while sinners, whom I despised, are brought in to feast on His wondrous mercy forevermore!”

III. Now I shall conclude by observing, concerning these people who are, in their own esteem, too good to be justified by Grace and who do not, therefore, seek God’s Grace, that **IT IS MOST FITTING THAT THEY SHOULD NOT BE JUSTIFIED.**

I will tell you why it is most fitting and, first, *because it is taking them on their own standing.* A man ought never to object to be taken at his own valuation. I once had an experience which may illustrate the way in which God will deal with men who are like this Pharisee. There came to me a gentleman—a very great gentleman—who wished to become a student of the College. He told me that in all probability, I had never had such a remarkable genius as he was offering himself as a student. Of course I was amazed and deeply gratified. I asked him in what way he could display his genius and he replied that he had been studying for the ministry for many years, that he was most fluent and eloquent and that, if I liked, he would preach me a sermon on the spot upon any subject that I chose to give him. I said, “No, I do not think that I could listen to a sermon from you just now, for I have a good many other people waiting to see me.” He went on to tell me about his wonderful attainments, but I stopped him and said, “I must decline your application.” “But why?” he asked. “Well,” I answered, “we have no such men as you are in the College. We have none of your sort.” “Well, then,” he said, “it is time you had.” So I told him that the tutors were very ordinary sort of persons and, according to his own account, he knew very much more than they did, to begin with, and I also said that the President of the College was a still more ordinary person and that, considering the way in which I was confounded by his dazzling genius in that short con-

versation, I really must decline him. It was not possible that we should be able to get on together, for there was nothing that he could learn, as he already knew everything, so there was no need for him to become a student with us.

You may imagine his surprise because I took him on his own footing. He showed himself off to be such a remarkably wonderful man that all I could feel was, “I can read you through and through and understand what a fool you are.” I did not tell him so, but I met him on his own ground and told him that he was much too good for me to receive into the College. I believe it was right that he should be so answered, for Solomon said, “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.” And, oh, how grimly and solemnly will God, at the last, answer every self-righteous fool according to his folly—“You say that you did not sin as that publican did. No and, therefore, you did not repent as that publican did. Christ came into the world to save sinners, but, according to your own declaration, you are not one of them, so He did not come to save you. He has shed His blood to wash the filthy, but you say that you are not filthy, so you shall never be washed, you shall forever remain as you are.” This will be one way of letting the self-righteous see how God laughs at the calamity of those who have despised His mercy when their fear comes. All their self-righteousness was a mocking and a laughing at Christ and His precious blood—and at Free Grace and the Gospel—so the time will come when they will hear another kind of laugh and it will be but fitting that they should.

It is fitting that the self-righteous should not be justified and they, themselves, cannot wonder at it, because *they know that they are unwilling to accept the Gospel*. They cannot wonder that they do not have its blessings, for they do not like its terms! There are some of you, I fear, who are not willing to make a confession of your sin. You say that you do not wish to be saved by charity, to be delivered from going down to the Pit by the Sovereign, unmerited Grace of God—you must have a hand in the matter, somehow, for you think you have some claim upon God! Well, then, do you wonder that what you will not receive is denied you? They who shut their eyes must not marvel if the sun seems no more to shine for them. When men will not hear, they must not be surprised if the voice ceases to speak. Take heed unto yourselves, you who are trusting in your own righteousness, lest God, taking you at your word and seeing you unwilling to accept the blood and righteousness of Christ, may justly give you over to perish in your sin!

What an awful sight that will be—a *man everlastingly a martyr to his own pride!* Even the demons in Hell might ask, “Why did that man come to Hell? Was he unjust?” No. “Was he an extortioner?” No. “Was he an adulterer?” No. “Then, why did he come here?” Because he would not go to Heaven by Grace! He thanked God that he was not as other men are, but he has not much to thank God for, now, for he finds himself cast out while many of the other men, whom he despised, are saved. “But why did he go to Hell?” Only to keep up his own pride, to have his own way and not to bow his neck to Christ’s righteous rule. When a man sacrifices his life for his country, when a man loses his life on behalf of science—above all, when a man is burned to death for God and for the Truth, I can honor him—but when a man loses his soul for the sake of his pride, angels and men may well cover him with everlasting contempt!

O Sirs, I pray you, if pride is keeping you out of Heaven, give it up and cast yourselves down at Jesus’ feet! The old fable tells us of a fox that entered into a vineyard by a very small hole. He was very thin, then, but he ate so many of the grapes that he grew to be twice his former size and could not get out again! He could have been caught and killed because He had grown too big to make his escape, so there was nothing for him to do but to starve himself down to his former size and so get out to a place of safety. And if you have made yourselves so big with your own righteousness that you cannot get through that strait and narrow way of yielding to Christ, trusting Him and obeying Him—then you must shrink and starve yourself down to this size. I pray God speedily to bring you down to it till you, too, shall be a bankrupt sinner, an emptied sinner, a condemned sinner—and then shall just look to Christ upon the Cross and live, for—

*“There is life for a look at the Crucified One,
There is life at this moment for you”—*

if you will but look there for it! But if you will look only to yourself for it, you will perish in your iniquity and your blood will be upon your own head. God bless this word to all whom it concerns, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
*LUKE 18:1-14.***

Verse 1. *And He spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint.* “Not to faint” in their expectation of answers to their supplications and, therefore, give up prayer, but to persevere in presenting their petitions at the Throne of Grace because prayer is never lost labor. There may be a time during which God does not appear to answer prayer, but He will ultimately answer it. Therefore “men ought always to pray, and not to faint” in prayer. If they do not pray, they will faint in many ways. Their courage will faint. All their hope as to the future will faint and fall into a dead swoon, as it were. So, dear Friends, you have your choice between praying and fainting! The doctrine our Savior laid down was “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” And this is the parable which He related in illustration of that Truth of God.

2. *Saying, There was in a city a judge who feared not God, neither regarded man.* He was a most unfit person to be a judge, as many in Eastern cities still are. They are ready enough to take bribes, but they are not so prompt in giving just judgments. They generally attend to the business of the rich and the powerful, but neglect the poor and needy. So was it with this judge who, “feared not God, neither regarded man.”

3. *And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of my adversary.* Probably someone had come and taken away from her the little bit of land that her husband had left her, upon the produce of which she and the children might have lived, and she could not get it back. So she comes to the judge, and cries, “Avenge me of my adversary.”

4. *And he would not for a while.* He had plenty of applicants who could pay him better than this poor woman could, so he disregarded her petition. But he little knew that, in her, he had to deal with a woman who meant to be heard and who intended to press her suit until she won it. She was evidently a very determined character. Though a broken-hearted widow, yet she was not broken-spirited even though the judge refused, for a while, to attend to her plea.

4, 5. *But afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.* She came again and again, and again and again—she would not leave off coming, for she meant to have the justice she sought and she got it. Now that is the way to pray, as if we would even weary God with our supplications, though we can never do so! It is impossible to weary Him with earnest believing entreaties, yet we must show the same determination in prayer which this importunate widow manifested while pleading with the unjust judge.

6. *And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge says.* He is unjust, but he is now obliged to be just! He is hard-hearted, but he is compelled to yield! The widow has conquered him, not by her money, but by her importunity! She is there so often that she troubles him and he says he must give in and grant her request.

7. *And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?* He may seem to be slow about it, but when His people cry to Him, He will ultimately hear them if He does not at once. Do not imagine that the children of God will always be laughed at and downtrodden. God will yet arise and take their side. They may be pushed into a comer for a while, but they shall come out into a large room in due season, for God will certainly avenge His own elect.

8. *I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?* If anybody could find it, He could, for He creates it all and He knows where to look for it, yet there is so little of it that even He, whose eyes can detect the faith that is as small as a grain of mustard seed, can scarcely find it. There is all too little real faith in the world and those who think they have most of it, when they get into troubled waters, soon find they have not any to spare—and much that they thought was faith does not turn out to be so. O Brothers and Sisters, how little do we trust our God compared with what He deserves!

9, 10. *And He spoke this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. Two men went up into the Temple to pray.* They were both alike in going up to the Temple, but they were very different in coming back from the Temple. It is a very important thing to come to the House of God in a right state of heart—and it is a still better thing to go away from the Lord’s House really benefited and improved. These two men went up to the Temple with the same objective—each of them went there “to pray.” Both intended to pray, though they did not both do so—but that was their objective.

10. *The one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.* A tax-gatherer, one of the most hated people in Christ’s day, because none but the lowest class of Jews would collect taxes for the Romans and, as a general rule, they farmed the taxes

and greatly increased them by demanding of the people much more than was due. They were, therefore, held in the worst possible repute. I am not sure that tax-gatherers are the objects of much love anywhere, but, among the Jews, they were detested because they were collecting tribute for the Romans whom the conquered nation abhorred.

11. *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank You, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.* So it is evident that he noticed one person who was there, though I do not find that the publican took any notice of him. We can tell by this remark that the mind of the Pharisee was wandering from his supposed devotions. It is a bad sign in a so-called worshipper when he knows a great deal about other people who are in the Lord's House. I have known many people whose recollection, after a sermon, has been quite as much about who was there and who was not there, as it has been about what was in the sermon, and what was not in it! So this Pharisee's eyes went gadding about and he spied out the poor publican, but, after a contemptuous reference to him, he returned to the catalog of his own virtues and excellences.

12. *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.* There his prayer ended and he stood in a most enviable state of contentment, delighted with himself, lost in the contemplation of his own ineffable purity. I think I see him in all his glory, yet I quickly turn to the other part of the Temple, further away from the most sacred place, for there I behold the true worshipper.

13. *And the publican, standing afar off.* Not afar off from the Pharisee, only, but afar off from the sacred shrine, the innermost Temple, as if unworthy to be there at all—"the publican, standing afar off."

13. *Would not lift up so much as his eyes unto Heaven.* That throne of the Highest—as if even a glance from his unholy eyes might defile that sacred place! He bowed his eyes downward, as if to read in the earth the record of his sin. He did not dare to look up.

13. *But smote upon his breast.* His heart smote him and he smote upon his heart.

13, 14. *Saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.* The great Lord and Master acts as He would have His true servants do. It was said of some of them that they turned the world upside down and that is exactly what He does! He abases those who exalt themselves and He exalts those who abase themselves. He lifts up the lowly and casts down them of high degree in their own estimation—and so shall it be to the end of the world.

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