



## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

### A good example from a bad man

***A sermon preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day evening, 28th February 1999, by the minister.***

*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 , Luke 18:13.*

The publican was a bad man. That he acknowledged himself. We do him no injustice by repeating his own description of himself. He was by profession a renter of taxes. His was a detested occupation and that because of the greed and harshness associated with its practice.

It would appear that the government of Rome rented out districts for a set sum of money and then left it to those who had rented the district to raise what rent they could. Naturally, the renter sought to make a profit and pursued the citizens remorselessly for the payment of the tax. It was this ruthlessness and greed which gave the publicans such an evil reputation in the eyes of the populace. His public image was far removed from that of the Pharisee. One was religious; the other was not. Yet we find here, however, that man's impression of others may be entirely wrong. This publican was on his way to heaven while the Pharisee was not. May God give us understanding of His Truth tonight.

#### **I. THERE IS HOPE FOR THE WORST OF SINNERS**

The guilty and the hell-deserving may approach God in prayer and obtain remission of sin freely from Him.

**1. This man felt himself to be a sinner but he prayed** . He calls himself the sinner. He could not even look up to heaven he was so ashamed of his sins. As far as he was concerned, there were no other sinners. His sin filled his gaze. He had eyes for no one else's sin.

So it is when God reveals a man's sin to him. He becomes blind to the sins of others, so great do his own appear to him. David in Psalm 51 speaks of this. *For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me* , verse 3. To the sinner whom God convicts, there exists nothing other than the burden of his sin.

**2. This great sinner was heard by God.** We have the Saviour's word for it. It was not a lengthy prayer! It was not an eloquent prayer! It was an exceedingly simple prayer! It was short, taking only seconds to say. Yet it caught the ear of God. It was heard for it was a confession of sin. That is the prayer that gets God's attention.

**3. He went away from the temple with a new standing with God** . He was Justified. He went home a righteous man in the eyes of God. That is the meaning of justification. See it explained in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith. "Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing



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faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God."

Thus that publican was accepted by God on the basis of the obedience of Christ being accounted his. That is how a sinner becomes acceptable to God. Not what we do but what Christ has done for His elect becomes the basis of our hope and faith.

**4. He is not the only sinner to have been saved** . Countless millions have passed from spiritual death to spiritual life exactly as did the publican. This is the only basis of reconciliation with God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, 2 Corinthians 5:21. Christ donned our sins and went to the cross and was punished there in our place. The believing sinner dons His righteousness and is accepted into God's presence and reconciled to God on the basis of Christ's righteousness. That is the gospel.

### II. A TRUE SIGHT OF OUR SINS WILL TURN US TO GOD

The man who sees his sin ceases to be an atheist or indifferent to the needs of his soul. He must have forgiveness. He must be rid of his corruption.

**1. A true sight of our sins can only be had in the light of God's Word.** The dimensions of our sin will be sadly underestimated without that light. We will pray like the Pharisee until we see our sins in the light of God's Word. Let us return to David and his words in Psalm 51. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest* , verse 4. He saw himself as God saw him and he trembled at the sight!

**2. The instruction of the Holy Spirit is also necessary for a true sight of our sin** . He will have to uncover the evils of our heart and nature and show us most unpalatable things about ourselves. It is under His teaching, a sinner will honestly speak of himself as did the publican. Our hearts are adept at concealment. *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?* Jeremiah 17:9. It is only by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that the true state of the heart will be acknowledged by the sinner.

**3. A true sight of our sin will make us seek God** . Once a man is convinced that he is the victim of a life-threatening disease, he willingly approaches the surgeon and places himself in his care, submitting to whatever surgery he says is necessary to accomplish a cure even though, in different circumstances, he would have run a mile rather than contemplate undergoing such treatment. This is what the Saviour was referring to when He said: *And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick* , Luke 5:31.

How many today are satisfied with going to church! That is because they do not know the extent of the dread disease of the soul that is bringing them down to hell. Such was the religion of the Pharisee. He felt no need of mercy or pardon. He did not know his heart. *For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, mur-*



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*ders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man* , Mark 7:21-23.

Here are the very things he thought he did not suffer from yet, according to Christ, these things fill every heart and necessitate pardon and cleansing.

### III. CONFESSION OF SIN AND DEPENDANCE UPON MERCY BRING SALVATION

Hear the prayer. *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* . See the answer! *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified* , verse 14. Here is a confession of sin coupled with a dependence on mercy and it resulted in salvation for this penitent sinner.

**1. His confession was totally without reservations.** He offered no excuses! He did not plead his circumstances in mitigation! No! He cast himself upon the mercy of God.

**2. His dependence was on mercy alone.** Have mercy on me. He did not plead his sorrow over sin. He undoubtedly was sorry but that is not the basis upon which a sinner obtains forgiveness. He did not plead his desire not to continue in sin and I am sure he did have a strong desire to have done with his past evils. No! It was God's mercy alone he pleaded.

**3. He was saved.** This runs completely against the notions of modern religion. It is the view of many, including so-called ministers of Christ, that partaking of the sacraments, attendance at church, engaging in what are called good works and various other activities are necessary for salvation. It is not so!

This man who came to the temple as a sinner, left it justified before God. He came traveling the road to hell and left a pilgrim on his way to heaven. This is the glorious miracle of conversion. We have Christ's word for it: *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other*, verse 14.

The first place to see the change was his home. You can go home tonight a changed person, a justified person, a saved person. Take the sinner's place before God and cast yourself on His mercy and on the merits of Christ and you too will be accepted and saved.