

CRYING IN THE CHAPEL

AND OTHER MESSAGES

by

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CHAPTER ONE

CRYING IN THE CHAPEL

“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 a week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes toward heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went home justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:10-14).

The devil tells man that he is O.K.; the Bible tells him that he is K.O. The Word of God constantly reminds us that man in his natural state is at enmity with God and cannot find the way of mercy on the basis of human merit. The chief function of Christianity is to bring the individual to a point of spiritual honesty where he will pin the blame for his condition upon himself and not upon others or upon circumstances. For this self-appraisal is the prelude to his salvation, and the spiritual honesty engendered by this technique is the raw material out of which God will build His kingdom.

This was the lesson that Christ was seeking to teach by the use of this parable.

The outward shell of human conduct is not the determining factor in conversion. God wants man to be right at the core of his being. As long as the individual thinks himself self-sufficient, as it was in the case of the Pharisee in our story, the mercy of God cannot swing into action and produce the harmonious relation that is called salvation. But when the sinner realizes the nature of his condition, that he is not able to save himself and that the grace of God is his only hope, then the work of eternal redemption becomes a reality within the framework of human experience.

The publican was conversant with his demise. He could have marshaled some personal achievements in his favor. No one is batting zero in the moral realm. Everyone of us can think of some good things that we have accomplished. But the publican realized that these were coins of no value. He was facing the eternal God, who is perfect, and to whom our righteousness is like filthy rags.

The coasts of eternity reek with wrecks of immortal souls who placed their feeble trust upon the fragile ship of human achievement. The publican acknowledged himself to be a sinner. He immediately and succinctly laid the ax at the root of the tree. His speech is short because he got to the heart of the situation. He could have made a long talk and become prolix by dealing with marginal matters. "Have mercy upon me, have mercy upon me!" This was his cry. He didn't marshal his good deeds. He didn't ask God to audit his books. He said, "Deal with me, there's where the problem resides."

A man came once to the door of a minister at a late hour. The visitor said to the minister, "Sir, come out here and talk to me about my problems." The minister replied, "You come in here, and let's talk about your sins."

God help us to come to Him in the spirit of the publican. In this hour, only that can save us.

God cannot save peacocks. You cannot strut to Calvary; you must come on hands and knees. Humble yourself tonight and He will exalt you. Exalt yourself, and you will go from this place in a worse condition than when you came in. The mercy of God is available to all, but the condition is that we admit we need it, and then appropriate it to our sinful state.

Jesus informed us that the publican went home justified. The Pharisee went home dignified. I would rather go home justified, wouldn't you, than to go home dignified? The Pharisee thanked God that he was not like other men. He should have thanked God that other men were not like him. The publican couldn't lift his eyes toward heaven, but he lifted his heart. He was crying in the chapel, "**Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.**" God heard that prayer, and He will hear yours now, if you will turn your heart in humility toward Him.

I. THE GOODNESS OF THE PHARISEE

The Pharisee was satisfied with himself, but God wasn't satisfied with him. The Pharisee was using religion for a cosmetic. He looked pretty good on the outside. He was cleaning the outside of the cup, but the inside was filthy and despicable. He was like a beautiful cemetery, lovely without, but within, full of dead men's bones. The Pharisee was all front porch; the moment you opened the door, you were out in the back yard. He was like a cheap restaurant; the food was all in the window, and there was nothing in the kitchen.

Men do not realize that God looks not upon the outward appearance, but into the heart. Men fail to understand that the important facet in religion is not how one looks to man or to himself, but how does he look to God. Notice how long the speech of the Pharisee was. It takes him many words to tell God about himself. He could have told the story briefly, as did the publican, if he had told the truth.

I recall playing golf in Tennessee some time ago. They gave me a caddy, a little blond boy about thirteen years of age. The other boys called him "Radio."

I said, "Son, that is not your real name, is it?"

He replied, “No, sir. They call me ‘Radio’ because they say I talk too much.”

Well, the Pharisee could have been called “Radio.” He talked too much. He could have stated his condition in a few words. But he sought to camouflage his problems with a blanket of verbosity.

I guess we look good to ourselves, especially when we compare ourselves with others. But God is not measuring men by that standard. How do we compare with Christ? Ah, there we must say that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Christ is the glory of God, and we cannot measure up to Him.

I lived in San Antonio, Texas, the greatest part of my life. The weather is always balmy in that quaint town. We had one snow during my school days. I shall never forget it. It was the first snow that we had ever seen. Prior to the snowfall, we had picked up a stray dog. My brothers and sisters insisted I name our new pet. He was the whitest dog that I had ever seen. I named him “Snow White.”

Then one morning, my brothers and sisters came to my bed and awakened me with the cheerful news that snow had fallen during the night. We looked out the kitchen window for hours, viewing that miracle in white. As we were looking out the window, our dog ran across the snow chasing a cat. Folks, that was the blackest dog! I had thought he was white, but the background of the snow brought out the fact that he was not white. So we changed his name. We called him “Midnight.” So we look good in comparison with others, as did this Pharisee, but when we put Christ in the background, we are black sinners in need of mercy.

We do not have too much to brag about. And the Pharisee did not realize this. Often we hear men say that man is made in the image of God. This is not altogether true. Adam and Eve were made in the image of God, but we are made in the image of fallen Adam and fallen Eve. We might boast about our ancestors and their achievements, but actually every one of us descended from a crooked farmer and a drunken sailor. Adam was the crooked farmer, for he took of the forbidden fruit, and Noah was the sailor, who got drunk after the Flood. God had spared him and he got drunk. As Sam Jones said, “And there was no excuse for it; there was plenty of water around the place.”

The Pharisee passed judgment upon the publican. This is God’s job; **“the Lord knoweth them that are His.”**

The Pharisee told God he was not like the publican. He acted as if he were called to be an umpire in the game of life. We are not called to be umpires; we are only one of the players. God is the umpire; leave the task of judgment up to Him. We have no right to criticize others or compare ourselves with others. The self-righteous man made the mistake of passing judgment and thus he hid himself and robbed himself of the blessing of cleansing. Look to yourself just now! How is it with you on the inside? The Pharisee looked in, for he thought himself to be in good shape; he looked around, for he thought the publican to be in a bad shape, but he failed to look up. Had he looked up, like Isaiah in the Temple, he would also have said, like the prophet, **“Woe is me, for I am undone.”**

The story goes around that in an actors' club in Hollywood there was a rebellious character who continually made fun of religion and of Jesus Christ. At one of their gatherings, one member got up and read a poem that he had composed. It went like this:

We've heard in language highly spiced,
That Crow does not believe in Christ.
But what we here would love to know,
Does Jesus Christ believe in Crow.

That is the issue. What does Jesus think of me? Had the Pharisee asked, he would have heard Christ say, "***Your righteousness is like filthy rags. Your good works are not enough. Though you are a good moral man, salvation is an essential need in every soul.***" Jesus rejected the goodness of the Pharisee.

II. THE GUILT OF THE PUBLICAN

The short prayer of the publican painted the picture. "**Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.**"

We do not know why he went to church. Publicans were not among the attendants in the Temple. Perhaps a praying mother encouraged him to find the answer there. Perhaps a faithful wife had been bombarding the gates of heaven with persistent intercession in his behalf. Who knows, maybe his baby had died, and he had tried to find refuge from this raging storm within the haven of the sanctuary. Perhaps the sickening monotony that sinful living provokes had driven him to find a way to solve this inward problem within the confines of the house of God. We do not know how he got there, but get there he did, and he got down to business.

He was a publican, a tax collector, a member of the bureau of internal revenue. He didn't feel worthy to approach the altar. His humility is commendable, and he manifested it unmistakably.

- He used his eyes to express humility, for he would not lift them up to heaven.
- He used his feet to manifest his humility, for he stood afar off.
- He used his hands to reveal his humility, for he pounded his breast.
- He used his voice to manifest his humility, for he pled for mercy.

My friend, God knows the tricks of the heart. "**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?**" But this can be your finest hour, if you will kneel at the cross and accept the appraisal of God's Word that you are a sinner, and plead for Him to become operative within the citadel of your soul.

And He will have mercy upon anyone who will come unto Him. Christ does not look upon the outward condition, or upon the status of life, or even on the defeats of the past. Perhaps the publican had heard about the conversion of Zacchaeus who was also a publican. Maybe someone reminded him that one of Jesus' own disciples, Matthew, was a publican. It matters not who you might be or what you might have done in the past — there is a fountain open in the house of David. There is a balm in Gilead and a Physician who never fails.

He knows your case and will deal with you in mercy if you will come unto Him.

A little girl was on her knees praying the Lord's Prayer and she made a mistake that was, nevertheless, true. She said, "Our Father which art in heaven, how does He know my name."

Well, He knows your name and your nature, and He will not be oblivious to the cry of the penitent heart.

Without a doubt, the only people who will be in heaven are those who know that they deserve to be in hell.

The way of salvation is open to the person who is willing to admit that the genesis of sinful rebellion arises within the recesses of the human heart. The publican of our story did not blame anyone for his sins. He didn't blame his wife or his parents or his children. He did not pin the blame upon his environment. He said, "I am a sinner." He didn't even talk about the Pharisee. The publican was not looking around; he was looking in. David never found peace for his harried soul until he came to grips with the real problem. David's problem was David. He admitted that he tried to bribe God. In Psalm 51 he said, **"I would bring rams and bullocks, but you won't accept that, but O, a broken and a contrite heart, Thou wilt not despise."** He will accept a broken heart, if you are willing to give Him all the pieces.

Spurgeon calls the publican's prayer "a holy telegram."

You will notice that the heart of his petition is where he begs for mercy. Mercy is what sinners need, and the publican got in line with the blessing. In Titus 3:5 we are told, **"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."**

I heard the story about a woman who went to a photographer to have her picture taken. She returned a few days later to review the proofs. She was quite disappointed and exclaimed, "These pictures don't do me justice!" It is reported that the photographer replied, "Sister, you don't need justice— what you need is mercy!"

And that is true about everyone of us. We need the mercy of God.

- Our sins cry out for His mercy.
- Our failures cry out for His mercy.
- Our follies cry out for His mercy.
- Our iniquities and transgressions cry out for His mercy.
- Our souls need mercy like the flower needs the sun and the rain.
- Our souls need mercy like a fish needs water;
- Our souls need mercy like our lungs need oxygen.

May God help us to plead for His mercy, which is plentiful and effective.

The publican knew that he needed mercy.

He did not cry for reformation. He did not plead for a transient resolution that would satisfy him temporarily. He was not asking for first aid which is for the moment; he wanted surgery. He wanted a permanent cure. There is a difference between being whitewashed and being washed white. His heart was hungry for the real blessing.

I sometimes think that he stood in the vestibule because he did not know how to act in church. But his heart was right, and if that is so, the blessing of salvation is sure to come. God is not interested where it happens.

- Matthew became a Christian in his place of business;
- Zacchaeus on top of a tree;
- Nathaniel got saved under a tree;
- The jailer received redemption in a prison,
- The dying thief got saved pinned to a cross.
- Lydia found the Lord by the river bank,
- The apostle Paul became converted in the suburbs of Damascus.

The publican called himself a sinner. There is no attempt to hide or run from reality. Worse than being a sinner, is not admitting that you are one. There is more sin in subterfuge and substitutes than there is in actual wrongdoing. The prodigal son was ready to come home when he said, **“I will arise and go to my father, and I will say unto him, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight.”**

God can never save us as long as we are deceived about ourselves. Honesty concerning our own condition is an imperative element in our conversion. Repentance, which is an admission that you cannot save yourself, creates the vacuum into which the wind of God’s regenerating Spirit can rush in.

A group of Christians were kneeling in prayer at the altar. One of them was confessing his sins, but he was hedging and sparring with his deviation. He was saying, “O Lord, I didn’t do right, I know I shamed Your Name; I shouldn’t have been with that crowd.” Then a voice beside him said, “Go ahead and tell Him that you got drunk.” God requires this honesty before He can do business with us. The publican came clean, and the mercy of God was available.

III. THE GRACE OF GOD

I want to close this message by talking for a few moments about the grace of God. God could save the publican because He (God) was good and not because of any goodness on the part of the publican.

We are told in Titus chapter 2 that **“the grace of God that bringeth salvation has appeared to all men.”** In Ephesians 2 we are told that **“by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”**

The grace of God is the aggressive love of God in behalf of unworthy sinners who deserve to be in hell. If God's pursuing love were not swifter than man's sinful flight, no one would be saved. Redemption is possible not because we first loved Him, but because He first loved us. If you will furnish the sinner, God will furnish the Saviour.

There are three ways to acquire things. Everything you have in your possession you got in one of three ways. Either you earned it by your own efforts, or you stole it, or someone gave it to you. You can reduce all of your possessions into those three categories.

Let us for a moment look at how salvation can be achieved. We have been saying all through this message that you cannot earn it. Salvation is not by works—works result from salvation, but works do not produce it. The Pharisee in our story had all the works needed if man could be saved on the basis of good works, but he went home without the blessing.

I have often said that if you could carry human goodness to infinity, you could not earn one fraction of a per cent of salvation. If we could gather every good man that ever lived in the history of the world, and take from each one the best thing in his character, and combine these multiple qualities in one individual, that individual would still have to kneel at the cross and say, **"Lord, be merciful to me a sinner."**

So you cannot earn salvation, and you cannot steal it; that's for sure. There is just one way you can acquire it, and that is for Someone to give it to you.

God is the Giver, by His matchless grace, and the death of Christ on the cross is the substance of that grace. You recall what the writer said in the second chapter of the letter to the Hebrews:

"Thou hast put all things in subjection under his [Jesus'] feet . . . But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man."

The grace of God made possible the death of Christ. There can be no salvation without a cross. The blood of the Lord Jesus cleanseth from all sin. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. No wonder John, in the book of Revelation, could say, **"Now unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."**

Tertullian once said, "The grace of God turned my sunset into sunrise." Multitudes everywhere have realized this. Salvation originates in Him and finds its destiny in Him. He is the Author and the Finisher of our faith. He is the Prologue and the Epilogue in the plan of salvation.

So here is the solution to the problems we face in any generation. The grace of God is the answer to war, and divorce, and hatreds, and animosities, and moral deflections. If I could etch this truth into your soul, you would not leave without making your calling and election sure.

The grace of God never fails or fades; it never dims or dies. This grace has proven adequate in the lives of multitudes. Why don't you try the grace of God; you have tried the rest—now try the best.

Notice that the publican was saved instantly.

The moment a man comes to Christ with sincere heart, salvation becomes a completed fact forever. God does not save men on the installment plan; He saves them immediately and permanently. Often men say to me that they would like to be saved, but they are sure that if they submitted themselves to Christ, they could not live up to it. But in saying this, they have misconstrued the plan of salvation. God is not saving man on the basis of how man will behave himself in the future. If this were true, there would be no hope for any of us. But this glorious reality is insured to us by the matchless mercy of God which is available to all of us. So if you are a publican, there is hope for you; and if you are a Pharisee, there is need for you.

Let me close with this little story. One cold morning a train pulled into the suburbs of a small town and stopped suddenly. The people within were quite shaken by the sudden stop and wondered why the train had halted so abruptly. A businessman got out to inquire. He saw a crowd gathered around by the baggage car. The engineer and conductor and porter were in a huddle. The businessman was informed by the conductor that they had run over a man and cut off his legs. Someone got some clothes and bound the bleeding stubs, while another summoned an ambulance. When the ambulance arrived, the businessman said to the conductor, "Let me accompany the poor fellow to the hospital. I'm stopping off at this town, and the hotel is nearby." The porter got his bags; the attendants put the body in the ambulance along with the severed limbs.

The businessman could hear the injured man breathing heavily. The pale light of the morning moon was shining through the ambulance window upon the wan face of the victim. Then he began to move his lips. The businessman moved in close to listen, and the dying man said in a husky voice, "Friend, will you pray for me?"

The businessman replied, "I don't know how to pray. I never prayed a prayer in my life."

A few moments elapsed. The dying man said softly, "Pal, would you tell me a prayer that I could pray?"

The businessman said, "Well, one day I heard a preacher say that one could pray this prayer and the Lord would always hear it. '**Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.**' Why don't you try that prayer?"

The dying man stared for a moment, then his lips began to move. "**Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.**"

Softly he added, "That's a good prayer; I don't understand it, but it isn't dark now—there's a light shining. Something has happened; the load has been lifted; there is peace in my soul."

He turned to his companion and said, “Friend, why don’t you try it?”

They arrived at the hospital. The businessman got off and accompanied the victim. He waited, and then a doctor came and told him the sad news. The man had died. The businessman walked out into the hall and looked out the window. He wiped a tear from his weary face. The sun was rising in the east. Then he lifted his face to heaven and whispered, “**Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.**”

Then he paused, reached for his handkerchief, and as he walked away he was heard to say, “The man was right. It works! It really works!”

My friend, it will work for you. This moment join the millions who have breathed this prayer in moments of repentance, and you, too, will know the peace that passes understanding and misunderstanding.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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