

L 13 ... Getting Your Prayers Answered

Luke 18:9-14

I really like getting my prayers answered; do you? Jesus teaches us how to do so in this parable. The previous parable taught the importance of persistent prayer. In this parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector, our Lord gives us some additional principles for prayer.

Why does Jesus tell this parable ([18:9](#))?

This parable contains **three** vitally important principles for **getting your prayers answered**.

Avoid Arrogance (18:10-12)

This parable is about two men—one of whom is a *Pharisee*. The word *Pharisee* means “separated one.” Pharisees separated themselves from ordinary people and devoted themselves, with the help of scribes, to the study and interpretation of the Law. They were the largest, most influential group in Judaism. They controlled the synagogues and exercised great control over the Jewish population. They were the ones primarily responsible for transforming Judaism from a religion of forgiveness through sacrifice to one of the cold letter of the Law.

Therefore, they missed the spirit of the Law and were always anxious to condemn. Jesus calls them *hypocrites* and says: *for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte* ([Mt 23:15a-b](#)).

Then, what does He tell them ([23:15c-d](#))?

The Pharisees were super-religious and felt very comfortable in the temple in God’s presence. As a result, they were very arrogant before God. Therefore, the *Pharisee* in this parable proudly prays, thanking God he is not like other men who are *extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or as even this publican* ([18:11](#)).

In other words, “Thank You, God, that I am better than other people.” He had apparently skipped over a few verses in his Old Testament Bible.

For example, what do we read in [Psalm 14:3](#)?

That means there is not one person on earth who is inherently good. We all have selfish, sinful natures. The *Pharisee* continues to boast, *I fast twice in the week* ([18:12a](#)). The Law only required Jews to fast once a year—on the Day of Atonement ([Lev. 16:29](#)). However, this pious Pharisee fasts twice a week, or over a hundred times more than the Law required.

The sanctimonious Pharisee is not through boasting. He tells God, *I give tithes of all that I possess* ([18:12b](#)). This means he gives ten percent of all his income to God. The Law required Jews to tithe of the yield of their fields each year, as well as the firstborn of their herds and flocks ([Deut. 14:22-23](#)).

On another occasion, Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites because they *tithe of mint and anise and cummin*, which are worthless garden herbs but *have omitted the weightier matters of the law* ([Mt 23:23a-c](#)). What are the *weightier matters*, or more important aspects, of the Law that Jesus mentions ([23:23d](#))?

It is important to notice Jesus does not condemn the practice of tithing because referring to tithing, He says, *these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone* ([23:23e](#)).

There used to be a popular bumper sticker that read: "Honk, if you love Jesus." I never liked that one. But there was one that came later I really liked. It read, "If you love Jesus, tithe. Anyone can honk."

The Pharisee did not love God because he was too in love with himself.

To get your prayers answered, **avoid arrogance** and...

Ask Humbly (18:13)

Praying at the same time in the temple is a *publican*. The *publican*, or tax collector, was the polar opposite of the Pharisee. Israel was an occupied country, under Roman domination. The Romans financed the cost of occupation through taxes. Their system was very simple. A province would be put up for bids, with the office of tax collector going to the highest bidder. The tax collector would then submit the specified amount of tax money to the Roman government but could keep any surplus he could collect. If you had no scruples, it was a great way to get rich. Jewish tax collectors were considered to be corrupt traitors to their own people. They would be in the same category with dope peddlers and pimps today.

Jesus says the dishonest tax collector is *standing afar off* ([18:13a](#)). He is in the court of the temple but stands far away from the sanctuary. This would be like going to a worship service and standing in the foyer because you feel unworthy to enter the worship center.

Jesus also says the tax collector *would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven* ([18:13b](#)). Jews normally prayed looking up toward heaven.

For example, what does [Mark 6:41](#) record about Jesus' prayer when He prayed for the loaves and fish?

The tax collector is so ashamed he cannot raise his head before God. Instead, he *smote upon his breast* ([18:13c](#)), which was a sign of sorrow and contrition ([Lk 23:48](#)). However, convicted of his sin, he knows he has come to the place where he can find forgiveness.

Therefore, what does he pray ([18:13d](#))?

Because of his humility before God, the tax collector sees himself as a *sinner*.

The word **sinner** (**hamartōlos, ham-ar-to-los**) means "one who misses the mark." It refers to our fallen natures. It is like an arrow shot at a target but falling short ([Rom. 3:23](#)).

Though the tax collector knows he is a *sinner*, he asks God to be *merciful* to him. Mercy is not getting what you deserve. When a man throws himself on the “mercy of the court,” he is admitting his crime but asking not to be given the sentence he deserves.

The tax collector was apparently familiar with what prayer of David in [Psalm 51:1](#)?

There is only one reason God will be *merciful* to us when we ask. It is because of His never-ending *lovingkindness*. However, even though God always loves us, His mercy, as we shall see, is unavailable unless asked for **humbly**.

In prayer, if you **avoid arrogance** and **ask humbly**, you can....

Anticipate God's Loving Answer (18:14)

Jesus gives His divine evaluation of the two prayers. Referring to the tax collector, he says, *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other* ([18:14a](#)). In contrast, the Pharisee goes home feeling dignified but not *justified*. The word translated **justified** (*dikaioō*, **di-ki-ah'-oh**) means “to declare righteous.” Being justified means God makes it JUST-AS-IF-I'D never sinned.

How does [Romans 3:24](#) explain what it means to be *justified*?

Because of Jesus' death on the cross, we can be justified by faith ([Rom. 3:28](#); [Philip 3:9](#)).

Jesus concludes this parable about prayer: *for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased* ([18:14b](#)). Arrogant, self-righteous people will ultimately *be abased*, or humbled, when they stand before God and give account of their lives. On the other hand, Jesus declares, *and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted* ([18:14c](#)).

By God's mercy and grace, we will be exalted from sinners to saints and from hell to heaven.

How does [1 Peter 5:6](#) express this fact?

To get your prayers answered in kingdom living,

AVOID ARROGANCE,

ASK HUMBLY, AND

ANTICIPATE GOD'S LOVING ANSWER.