

A Lesson in Prayer, Part I The Un-Thankful Prayer
Luke 18:9-14

Intro

How many of you set out in life to intentionally be a sinner?

Whew...good, as your new pastor that is a relief!

- if we are honest this morning, most of us don't think we are bad people
- despite the fact that sin is sin....and one sin – just one sin – is enough to keep us from heaven and sharing in Jesus' eternal glory
- remember, the standard is pretty high...be perfect as your father in Heaven is perfect (matthew 5:48)**
- rationalize our behaviors by telling ourselves that surely there are other people worse than me
- I do some good things, I come to church every Sunday, well most Sundays
- I put something in the offering plate, well most of the time, if I have some spare change at least
- I pray before supper...well, at least when I am at home...okay, on most evenings....unless we are watching TV

Let me share a story with you....The story of Baptist Bob and Larry the Lowlife...

-a modern day parable, a fresh look at the parable Jesus told in Luke 18

As we look at the parable in Luke in light of our story of Baptist Bob, we must take notice of who this parable is addressed to in verse 9:

to those who were confident in their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else

- it is addressed to the people who feel the good things they do are enough to merit God's favor
- it is addressed to those who feel that just their presence in church on Sunday is enough to be blessed by a righteous and holy God
- it is addressed to those who feel the act of tithing is enough in God's eyes
- it is addressed to those who perform the act of praying as a ritual to be included in our daily routine

The story of the Pharisee and the publican is a parable about prayer

- but it is also a look at the attitude that should accompany not only our prayers but our worship, our service and our giving
- this morning I have titled it the parable of The Un-Thankful prayer

What are the characteristics of an un-thankful prayer?

Before we look at the characteristics of this unthankful prayer, let's look at the Pharisee, and the circumstances surrounding the prayer..

- standing position of the Pharisee was a common position for prayer but this man was most likely standing in a prominent position, probably up front
- he was a religious leader, pretty much like Baptist Bob
- would have been considered one of the good guys based on outward appearances

But on the inside....not so much....

First characteristic is that the person praying is

Unaware

Unaware of His greatest need...READ VERSES 11-12

- his prayer started out with Thanksgiving but that is as far as it got ... a start.
- and at that it was the wrong kind of thanksgiving

This man was not thanking God for what grace had done for him; he was thanking God for what he himself had done, and that is the wrong attitude.

H.A. Ironside

He was focused on human do's and don'ts

- he is not a robber...an evil doer....an adulterer....or even a publican, a tax collector
- he honors God by fasting two days a week...
 - Pharisees usually fasted on the days corresponding to our Monday & Thursday
 - wears his fasting like a badge of honor because it was above and beyond the call of duty
- oh, and he tithes...10% of his income...down to the very penny...no more, no less.... he wouldn't want us to miss that

The Pharisee probably spent a good amount of time on what he would wear

- thought about where he would stand, what he would say
- there would be other people around you know
- it was all part of the show and he wanted to be seen

Thank you Lord....that I am so great! (oh lord, its hard to be humble, when you're

- wow! it sounds like the Lord is so lucky to have this man in his service
- what would the Lord do without him?
- doesn't sound like he is going to have any trouble getting through the pearly gates does it?

Until he says.....I thank you that I am not like this publican or tax collector

- there his imperfection shines through

He was unaware that his greatest need is the same as "this publican or tax collector

- his greatest need is salvation through faith in Christ Jesus
- something he couldn't earn...
 - his fasting wouldn't pay the debt of his sin
 - his tithing won't satisfy the punishment required of sin
 - his legalistic attempt to keep the law won't get him any brownie points

-Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

-and man, is this one boasting....

D. L. Moody calls it a "very prayerless prayer. He said a prayer but he didn't pray any."

When we come on Sunday mornings....why do you come?

- ritual or routine....
- to see acquaintances or socialize
- did you come this morning aware of your greatest need....
- did you come thankful this morning for the answer to your greatest need?
- or did you just come? Because that's what we do on Sunday morning?

The next characteristic of the un-thankful prayer?

Unconcerned

VERSE 11....or even this publican...

This is a great example of being filled with pride rather than compassion

- true thanksgiving leads to thankful living
 - thankful for salvation this morning? Tell others about Christ
 - thankful for the provisions from a living God? Share with others
 - Food table for baskets...outdated food?
 - thankful for kindness and grace from a merciful God? Pass it on
 - thankful for Christian fellowship, friendship? Extend a hand of fellowship
 - thankful for answered prayers? Pray for someone else!

This is the spirit of Thanksgiving – sharing with one another all that we have.

This publican....the Pharisee was unconcerned with the needs of others because he is focused on self

- like so many of us absorbed in our own worlds, cares, and needs
- we see the parade one float at a time while God sees the whole parade at once

I know I have food in my fridge but I am either unaware or unconcerned that thousands of children in the world die each day due to hunger and starvation according to Bread For The World

- in 2008, nearly 9 million children died before their 5th birthday
- There are over 2 billion children in the world and half of them live in poverty

I am unaware or unconcerned that 80% of the world lives on less than \$10.00 / day

Infectious diseases continue to plague the rest of the world

- an estimated 40 mil people live with AIDS/HIV
- an average of 1 mil people die of malaria each year around the world

Over 1 billion people live without access to safe drinking water.

- that's 1 in 5 people in the world
- we think nothing of going to the tap for a glass of water or paying \$1 or more for a bottle of water.

Trafficking in women is the second largest global organized crime today, generating approximately US\$12 billion a year.

It is easy to be unaware.... In the comfort and safety of our spiritual lazy-boys

Unchanged.....

"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.

- True thanksgiving should change us
- the Pharisee went to a good place – the temple
- he went for a good purpose – to pray
- but He went home unchanged

It happens everyday in churches

- rather than let the words of the song touch our lives we argue about whether it was a hymn or a praise song, whether we have sung more hymns or praise songs
- instead of trying to find something of significance in the message, we take issue with the powerpoint or the pictures or focus on a technological glitch
- instead of coming in thanksgiving because we have a place to come and worship that doesn't leak and provides more than just a wind break, we complain about being too hot or too cold
- and because we have focused on everything in the world but God, we probably miss out on whatever message He had for us
 - He may have wanted you to get one point and you to get another
 - God may have wanted you to hear this particular sentence or thought and you a different idea
 - but because we have focused on the external aspects of worship rather than the preparation of our hearts to give our undivided attention to God for this hour or so, we miss whatever He has in store for us as individuals

as a result, we leave this house of worship unchanged....no different than when we came in...

Friends, please don't let this be you....

- spend some time in prayer before coming to worship
- take a moment to think about why we are here this morning
- confess your sins – take care of any bitterness or anger so that your heart may be pliable, soft, and changeable....

Conclusion

As a result of being unaware, unconcerned and unchanged...Scripture tells us the other man – the Pharisee - was not looked upon with favor by God...

-READ VERSE 14

However, this man.....referring to the publican was undeserving but exalted.

-READ VERSES 13-14

- notice the condition of the heart of this worshipper...
 - stood at a distance....most likely because he didn't feel worthy to sit towards the front in the places of honor or near the presence of God
 - would not look up toward the heavens or look up to God in an act of humility
 - beat his breast which was an act of contrition or grief
 - asked God for mercy..
 - because he was a sinner....

Looked down upon by most....

Matt 9:10-11 *Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many **tax collectors and other disreputable sinners***
-NLT says the Pharisees asked.....with scum?

Matt 21:32-33 *For John the Baptist came and showed you the right way to live, but you didn't believe him, **while tax collectors and prostitutes did***

But the publican or tax collector was not in church to make an appearance...

- he was there because he desperately needed God's mercy
- he couldn't lift his head up and look to the heaven because he was so burdened with his sin
- the Greek translates "have mercy on me, a sinner" as "have mercy on me, the sinner"
- he considered himself the chief sinner among sinners....
 - wasn't focused on the faults of others there in the temple
 - wasn't there for his prayers to be heard by others..
 - Scripture says he stood off at a distance

Yet it is not the so-called "good guy", the religious leader, the deacon who went home with the right relationship with God....

- it was the humble one who admitted his need for God's mercy...his need for a means of atoning for his sin....

Where do you stand this morning?

As Baptist Bob walked into church one Sunday morning, he was disgusted to see Larry Lowlife there, for Larry was a drug pusher who had just gotten out of jail. Bob warned some of the ushers to keep a close watch on Larry because he was a no-good crook.

Before the offering, it was Bob's time to pray. He walked proudly to the microphone and began to pray using his religious tone of voice, "Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that I've been a deacon in this church for 20 years. I even remember when I built this building using my own two hands. And I thank Thee that I haven't missed a single Sunday for over ten years. There were times, O Lord, when I was sick, but I came anyway. And Father, thou knowest I used to sing in the choir, until I was persecuted by the song leader who wouldn't sing my style of music—but I can endure persecution just like Thou didest. Thou hast blessed me financially so I've been able to give you much more than 10 percent. I Thank thee that I'm morally pure for I don't drink, and I don't cuss on Sundays, and I don't smoke unfiltered cigarettes and I don't use drugs or sell them—like someone who is among today. Lord, we need more people just like me in our church. And, Lord, help everyone to come out tomorrow night at 7 p.m. at Oak Park field to watch our church softball team beat the Methodists again and bless the gift and the giver. AMEN."

After napping through much of the sermon, Baptist Bob strolled out of church feeling good about himself because he made it through another Sunday. He liked leaving church because he didn't have to think about God again until the next Sunday.

Meanwhile, Larry Lowlife was slouched on the back pew. After hearing the message about God's forgiveness, he slipped to his knees, and began to pray. Holding his face in his hands he sobbed quietly, "God, I'm the dirtiest sinner in this town. I'm so sorry. I don't deserve it, but is there any way you can wash away my filthy mistakes? Please, God, I need you!"

I tell you, it was Larry Newlife, not Baptist Bob, who went home that day right with God. For he who struts his stuff before God will eventually be slapped down. But when you admit you are like dirt compared to God's purity, He'll pick you up and clean you up.