

How to Look When We Pray

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- [0 : 0 0] Amen. If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn to Luke chapter 18. Luke chapter 18. Jesus is the master teacher. He knows how to grab you and take you in.
- Every time I prepare a message on the words of Christ, I'm just hoping that I don't get in the way. Because his words are true and they have a way of just kind of turning everything upside down.
- I compared it a few weeks ago to when I used to watch boxing and give them some body blows and finally they drop their hands and open up their head and knock them out.
- And in the same way, Jesus had a way of speaking to folks in such a way that made them sensitive to what he had to say. In other words, he speaks of the poor who are rich, the humble who are great, the sinners who are forgiven, and the righteous that are really the sinners.
- He even does that when he teaches on how to pray. And in our passage today, he shows us the kind of prayer that works. And I believe he shows us how we ought to look when we pray.
- [1 : 2 1] Luke chapter 18, beginning in verse 9, it says, He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.
- Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.
- I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast 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 who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.
- Jesus said, Two men went up to pray. Now, to go to the temple, you had to go up. Jerusalem is a high point.
- [2 : 4 0] And any time you leave Jerusalem, you go down. So it became synonymous with going up to worship. When they talked about going up, they talked about going to worship.
- Even if you're looking down from the Mount of Olives, where the Garden of Gethsemane is, the Temple Mount sits a little lower than the Garden of Gethsemane. But even when you look at it, you still have to go down into the valley and come up to go to worship.
- Therefore, they were going up, being a righteous act of worship. One man was a Pharisee. Now, the Pharisees knew how to look.
- They had to look. Matter of fact, they were very concerned about their look. Deion Sanders' approach is look good, feel good, feel good, play good. And that's kind of like the Pharisees, you know.
- All Pharisees, we knock them a lot because Christ knocked them a lot. But they weren't bad people. They lived upright lives. The one that this one did more than was necessary.

[3 : 52] When he brags at the altar about fasting twice a week, that wasn't necessary. The reality is the law taught them to fast on the Day of Atonement.

But some would go, as my daughter would say, they were a little extra. They would do a little extra. And they would fast a couple of times a week, particularly on Monday and Thursday.

And to emphasize it even more, they would pale their faces with whitener to show their misery. Nevertheless, don't misunderstand me.

This is not a bad man. He would be considered upstanding. He would be considered a pillar. He went the extra mile. Not only that, but he gave extra, too.

One was to tithe their income, but... And one still to tithe his or her income. But not everything. They would tithe... Some would try to show out the things that they harvested.

[4 : 54] They would try to tithe on those things as well. Jesus mentions when he speaks to the scribes and the Pharisees and how they loved to tithe on mint and other herbs just to show.

But in reality, there were so many other parts of their life that wasn't right. Scripture is very clear that we're still to tithe our income, but not on everything. I mean, listen.

When the harvest comes in and you get those wonderful, beautiful tomatoes at the house, you don't have to bring the preacher the best you got. You don't have to do that. You can wait until they get old and rot.

But I'm telling you, it's not a biblical requirement. But if you do, don't brag about it on the altar. And that's what he was doing. He, along with many Pharisees, went above and beyond.

The problem with them going above and beyond is they went above and beyond for the wrong reasons. And Jesus verbally attacks them instead of the sharded sinner.

[5 : 50] Why? Because they were glorifying themselves instead of God. They were so prone to be proud of themselves and their upright living that they gravitated, listen to me, they gravitated toward looking right and being proud of how they looked.

They lived to be seen and looked down on anybody that didn't look the part. That wasn't up to par with what they wanted to appear to be.

Just listen in verse 11 and 12 of the eyes that are in his statement here. When he said, God, I thank you that I'm not like the other men.

I fast twice a week. I give tithe of all I got. Again and again, the emphasis was on I. Concerned about what he looked like.

Luke even says before the parable, he mentions why Christ mentioned the parable in verse 9 when he said he spoke of people who trusted in themselves and treated others with contempt.

[6 : 56] Literally, that means they counted others as nothing. They were not concerned with anyone else. They were concerned about themselves. And they thought they were enough.

They thought they could live good enough to be right with God. And the reality is they couldn't live good enough to be right with God and we can't live good enough to be right with God.

We need a Savior. There was also a tax collector there. A crook. A schemer.

He didn't look so good. There were people in church that day going, what's he doing here? He don't belong here. But I'll tell you what he was doing there.

He was humbling himself before an almighty God. Now, I don't want to make light of his sins because they were many and they were bad. Jewish tax collectors were appointed by the Roman government to collect taxes from their very own people and they were paid by the fees that they would add to the required tax.

[8 : 05] They were notoriously known as extortionists, ripping people off. Even Zacchaeus, when he came to the Lord, he said, because of what he had done as a tax collector, he said, I give 50% of all I have to the poor and I will pay back fourfold anyone that I have defrauded of anything.

That says two things about this man and about Zacchaeus. That one, they were crooked. And second, they were changed. Notice it says he was beating his breast. That don't relate to our culture as much as it does to that culture.

It means he's hurting. It means he's mourning. It means he's ugly crying. It means he's regretting. He's remorseful. It means he's sorry. Not that he got caught.

He's sorry that he was wrong. He's not asking God to look past his sin. He's not asking God to help him feel better about his sin. No, he says, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[9 : 14] Literally, he says there, oh, God, be perpetual to me, the sinner. Now, that verb there comes from the same word as used for the mercy seat where the blood of the offering was sprinkled.

What that gives us clue to is that this crooked Jew had a background that helped him to understand the necessity of sacrifice. He had been taught better.

There was a grandma praying somewhere in the background, I think. There was a mama that brought him up the right way, apparently, because he knew the word.

And he didn't have a lamb. He knew about a lamb. He knew about a priest. He didn't have a lamb, but he asked for forgiveness. He didn't have a priest, but he asked for forgiveness.

And humbly, yet boldly, he came before the throne, helpless, broken, needing a Savior. Now, you would expect a Pharisee in the temple, but you would not expect a Roman tax collector.

[10 : 17] One flattered himself. One was absolutely humiliated. One pretended to be righteous, but was not really. The other didn't pretend to be righteous, and he was made right.

One stood in an open, proud position, drenched with self-pride. Now, Herbert Lockyer says this, he asked for nothing, confessed nothing, and received nothing.

There's not much worship in that, folks. The other prayed at a distance. He stood away. He was ashamed.

And he cries out ashamed. He's beating his breast, remorsefully and broken. And as I pondered on that man last weekend, I thought about what he must be feeling and what he must be saying in his heart.

I couldn't help but think of that old song, Rock of Ages, that says, not the labor of my hands can fulfill thy law's demands. Could my zeal, no respite, no.

[11 : 26] Could my tears forever flow. All could never sin erase. Thou must save, and thou alone. Nothing in my hand I bring.

Simply to the cross I cling. I mean, this man looks dirty. And he's the one that gets clean. And the one that looks clean is the one that leaves dirty.

One is justified, one is not. One is forgiven, one is not. Because you've got to see your guilt in order for it to be made right.

So the Pharisee was concerned about how he looked in prayer, and the tax collector was not, and yet his prayer was effective. And effective prayer looks pretty good.

And when Jesus says that, the righteous establishment comes unglued. They don't like it?

[12 : 26] So what does that parable say to us? What does that mean to us? Well, I think it means, I think it tells us how we should look when we pray.

First, when we pray, we need to look up. We need to look up.

Because worship's not about us. It's about God. I want to ask you a rhetorical question. I want you to think about it, not only in our time together this morning, but throughout this day.

Why are you here this morning? I mean, many go to church to see what they can get out of it. I came because I want you to bless me today.

I came because I want you to serve me today. I want to see what's in it for me. And I'll just tell you, friend, that's not worship. That's no different than when you leave here and you go to a restaurant, make an order, waiting on somebody to serve you.

[13 : 31] I mean, that's no different than going to a show and saying, I paid the money, perform for me. Worship is turning our eyes upon Christ.

As the old song says, looking full in his wonderful face and allowing the things of this world to go strangely dim in the light of his glory and his grace. Worship is not about what do you have for me today, but Lord, what do you want of me today?

And I'm kind of weird because I don't like to call this hour a worship service because I think it does a disjustice to what we're supposed to be doing here.

To me, this is a worship hour. At least you hope it's an hour, right? But anyway, it's a worship hour. We're to serve him when we leave this room.

We serve him throughout the week. We serve him when we meet the people walking down the streets. We serve him as we follow his lead, as we trust in the Lord and lean not on our own understanding, but in all of our ways acknowledge him.

[14 : 46] That's how we serve. Worship is adoring him, putting him in proper place and privilege, but it's not service. I'll just tell you, I'm glad you're here, but this is not enough.

When you come in here, you ought to sing with all your heart. You ought to pray with all your might. You ought to listen and obey and give obediently and then go and then serve because sitting is not serving. The first act of worship is to look up.

The greatest scene of adoration and worship of God in Scripture, I believe, besides the book of Revelation, is in Isaiah chapter 6.

When Isaiah goes before the throne of God in prayer, God gives him a vision in the midst of horrible times in his country.

And I believe it's a pattern for us because it begins with Isaiah being caught up with the magnificent presence of God. And my friend, we need to get caught up. I pray that we get caught up.

[15 : 52] That's how we ought to begin our worship. Jesus teaches us in the model prayer. Our Father in heaven, holy is your name. The first thing we ought to do in prayer is look up because it's not about us, it's about him.

And then we also ought to look in. Because when we look up to the Lord, it's amazing how, I don't know how to describe this, but it's amazing how when we look up to the Lord, how there's a reflection that we can see of ourselves and the mess of the state that we're in.

After Isaiah worshiped at the throne of God, he said, woe is me, I am lost. I believe our lives will change when we see God for who he is.

And as this Pharisee did, missing meals and tithing double does not fix the state that we're in. We have to see that without the grace and forgiveness of God, we are all in a mess.

We're in a mess. And until we see that, until we acknowledge that, there's no hope. I mean, among Christians, there are many that do not smoke, do not drink, do not cuss or run with those who do.

[17 : 05] They're pretty people. They are excellent at golf or fishing or hunting or fixing. They have beautiful, clean, wonderful homes and spotless cars, and they put their all in their career and can show the fruit of it or at least part of it.

They may even be stewards of what they have, and they give faithfully and they attend faithfully and they speak eloquently. They seem to have it all, and they attempt to show that they do, in fact, have it all.

Just check Facebook. You'll see. But if that's the case, if that's the case for you, you've received your reward.

I mean, that's it. Because the problems that we have are within us, and there are many. And they are not solved if they or if we will not admit them to God.

We don't even admit them to ourselves oftentimes. And to confess our sins literally means to agree with God on what our sins are.

[18 : 15] To agree with God on our sins, that Christ died for our sin, and that our sins are a big deal because he died for them.

Even the little white ones, the little sins. Confess it, and confess it all. But I want to be clear, confess it to God.

I'm with Spurgeon, who said, if you ever make a confession before man, let it be a general one, but not a particular one. Because focusing on the gory details of your past stupidity and testimony time makes for a distraction.

It actually is another form of selfishness. But confessing it to God is getting it right. And through the scope of the Holy Spirit of God, we have to look inside of ourselves, and we get to look inside of ourselves and see what's really wrong with us.

I want you to imagine something. I want you to think about someone going to the doctor and making an appointment and going to see the doctor and getting in there and saying, Doc, I want you to know that I am in perfect health.

[19 : 34] I mean, my lungs are clear, my muscle tone is perfect, my digestion could not be better, my circulation's better than anybody else I know. I have no infections, I have no diseases, I have no hurts, I have no ailments.

Matter of fact, I was sitting in the waiting room out there looking at everybody. Man, I'm telling you, I am in perfect health, especially compared to them. What's the doctor to do?

What's the point of your visit except to brag about how great you are? But yet, that's sometimes the way we come before the face of the Lord.

Lord, look at me. But to really worship, to seek the face of God, you got to look in. Tell you what else you need to do, you need to look out.

It is easy to criticize this Pharisee. I mean, Luke tells us in the beginning what to look for before he ever started the parable. And folks don't like people like this Pharisee.

[20 : 43] Those perfect people or those people who think they're perfect. I mean, who does he think he is anyway? Don't like folks like that. But let us be careful. Some that criticize him will not spend the time that he does in prayer.

Some will criticize him for bragging about his tithe, yet in reality, they're robbing God themselves by not being stewards of what God has given to them.

So be careful because when we start criticizing others for what they're doing, we're doing the same thing the Pharisee was doing. Ivan, Ivor Powell said this.

He said, it's very easy to criticize a man who has only climbed halfway up a ladder, but if we have not even left the ground, our mouths should remain closed. If we're not careful, we'll be like that Sunday school teacher that taught this parable.

And at the end of it, she said, now let's thank God that we're not like that proud Pharisee. So when we pray, look out. Look out for surface prayers that do not get to the heart of the matter.

[21 : 51] Look out for sin that we try to justify but are much more wrong than we think they are. Look out for our attempts to avoid the reality of our sin and make it sound a lot milder than it is.

Euphemisms in prayer is dangerous. Look out about holding our head up so high even before the throne of grace. I'll tell you how you ought to look when you pray.

You ought to look out. And then lastly, I believe you ought to look around. And when you open your eyes at the close of your prayer, you ought to look around.

I noticed something about this Pharisee. I noticed about the tax collector too. It says the Pharisee stood by himself.

But it also says that the tax collector stood at a distance.

[23 : 00] We're to pray alone. We're to spend time with God alone. But we are not to stay there. Because when we get right, we have to open our eyes, get up from our place of devotion, or today, get up from our pew and look around and see where God would have us to serve.

It's easy to enjoy God alone. I do it practically every morning early before anybody else in my house is up. But then they get up.

And then you got to go face the world. You are not faithful to his plan if all you do for him is alone.

I said, I don't consider this a service. I consider it a worship hour. But I want you to know you'll have the opportunity in just a few minutes as we leave this place to serve others. And I have no idea how.

But God has strategically placed us here to use us in a mighty way. Even where we are now. Do not miss the blessings of Pickens First Baptist Church.

[24 : 25] Spurgeon said, Satan hates Christian fellowship. It's his policy to keep Christians apart. I've learned it.

Learned it from the Nature Channel. Watching those hyenas go in a pack with a lion hiding in the brush waiting on one hyena to hang out too long by himself.

And then he attacks. That's why Scripture says he's like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. And he'll sneak up on you too. Let's get together.

Let's make a point to step outside of our comfort zone maybe. We are blessed with the opportunity for small groups. We are blessed with prayer groups.

We are blessed with groups that walk through a study together. We are blessed with groups that just get together weekly, reflect on a few things, pray together, and fellowship together.

[25 : 36] In a couple of weeks we'll have our Thanksgiving meal together. We'll celebrate the Lord's Supper around the table. We'll have the opportunity to fellowship together. And Satan loves to keep us away from those things.

He loves to keep us idle. He loves to keep us between places. Not committed. Just continuing on.

muttering on instead of really investing our lives. So let's get together. You want to know how you look when you pray?

You look up. You make him the focus of your prayer. Our hope and prayer is not to change heaven but to change us.

So look up. Look in. Look out because we can easily get in trouble thinking too much of ourself and then look around.

[26 : 51] Let God use you. It's interesting to me how Jesus closes this. as the worship hour closed the Pharisee went away even more guilty than the one that he came in with and that dirty old tax collector left justified.

That's what Scripture says. He left justified. You know what that means? That means he left clean. So my question today is how are you going to leave today?

Oh, Pastor, I'm fine. I'm not a Pharisee and I'm not a tax collector. Yeah, I know.

Pharisee realized my question is did the Pharisee realize that he left in worse shape than he came? Probably not.

And a lot of folks leave church the same way. And I'm just saying quit standing over there. Truly know where to look how to look when you pray and then do what he tells you to do.

[28 : 16] with every head bowed and every eye closed. I ask you this morning where are you at?

I don't mean the address. I know that. I mean, what is it in your life that you need God to intervene in?

That needs to change in you. It's possible that one's here this morning and you've never you've never surrendered your life to Christ. You may have been part of church. You may not have been.

You may have been raised in a good home. You may not have been. But in reality in your own life there's never been a time when you've surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ. You've asked him to forgive you and to cleanse you and to come into your life and change you.

And if that's your story I want you to know that today's the day of salvation. you have the opportunity to come to him and be changed by him. Maybe you're here and you do know that you're a Christian but the reality is you ain't praying right.

[29 : 25] You ain't looking in the right place. You ain't looking the right way. God needs to do a work in your life and I'm thankful this altar is open. I'd love to pray with you if you'd like or you can do it right where you are.

Whatever God leads you to do I just think you ought to get it settled before you leave this place. Maybe you're here and God's drawing you to this fellowship.

You know this is where you're to be. I just ask you to obey God. Just do what he tells you to do. Maybe you've made a private decision but you've never made that public.

You've never been baptized as a believer. I want you to know you're welcome to come. I'd love to talk to you about that. Jesus told us about a proud Pharisee and a dirty sinner so that we could see our own life and see what it is in our life that needs him to touch and to change and I encourage you to do just that this morning.

Heavenly Father I love you and I thank you for the privilege you give us to worship this morning Lord. Lead us oh God I pray right now to simply be obedient to follow you.

[30 : 45] In Jesus precious name Amen.