

Study Guide

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BY STILL WATERS



5. Prayer and Pride TRANSCRIPT OF VIDEO

If there was one group that Jesus targeted relentlessly during His public ministry on earth it was those who were “self-righteous” and “proud about it.” Within this group the Pharisees got Jesus’ highest attention.

In Luke Chapter 18 Jesus tells the parable of two men who went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector whom Jews hated. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed “God, thank you that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers and certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week and I give you 10% of my income.’

On the other hand, the tax collector stood at a distance without daring to lift his eyes to heaven. Instead, he sadly beat his chest, saying, ‘*O God, be merciful to me, I am a sinner.*’

As he ends the parable Jesus says this, “it is the remorse filled sinner and not the self-righteous Pharisee who was acceptable before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humble himself will be exalted.”

Yes, we must come to God with humility and an honest estimate of ourselves. He will then respond with compassion. But, if we come to him with pride thinking we are right and everyone else is wrong, then He will humble us.

The Pharisee approached God in prayer and started off on the right note expressing “thankfulness.” But, his thankfulness was not directed to God, but rather he was thankful for his own actions and accomplishments.

In his prayer he informs God of that he was better than everyone else including the tax collector because he fasted twice a week. This is an important detail mentioned by Jesus which contributed to the man’s sense of superiority. While Jews were required to fast only once a year on Atonement Day, this man fasted twice a week and so felt he was way ahead of the others. In addition, he was better than others because God received 10% of all his income regularly. This is the type of Pharisee Jesus probably had in mind when He mentions, “For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith.” Yes, the Pharisee’s faith and pride were in his actions and achievements and when he prayed he probably felt God would be thrilled about having someone like him in His temple.

But, before we totally condemn the Pharisee, let us realise we too are capable of approaching God’s house of prayer and praying in different ways, but those too may be unacceptable ways to Him.

If not the self-righteousness and proud approach as the Pharisee, we could be approaching Him with a sense of entitlement that God has to answer all our prayers with a “Yes.”

Or we could be approaching God in prayer in a very cavalier manner – treating prayer just another routine item to tick off our to do list.

Solomon advises us in Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 on how to enter and treat our time of prayer with God. It must be with reverence and thoughtful words because God is holy. He says, “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than offer Him the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.”

In fact, Jesus tells us in Matt 6:7 that when we pray, we should not keep repeating empty phrases thinking that the more words we use the better reception our prayers will have with God.”

But, Jesus on another occasion not only offered us a model to pray, in what we call the Lord’s prayer, but He revealed an important aspect of our relationship with God through Him. Jesus said we could address God as our Father in Heaven. A new and radical relationship with God. When Jesus uttered in Aramaic “Aavoon” or “Our Father” He gave us a hitherto unavailable tender access to God the Father.

Today we can approach our heavenly Father with the confidence of belonging to Jesus and address Him as our Father in heaven.

Yes, the next time you and I approach God in prayer, may we do it with humility and reverence due to the Creator of the universe and the honour due to our Father so that we are blessed as His children.

As Paul says in Galatians 6:14, if we are ever to boast in anything, may we only boast about our Lord Jesus and what He did for us on the cross.

May God bless us all as we prepare to reverentially remember this upcoming Good Friday what Jesus did for us on the cross.

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