

False and True Praying to God

by Peter Masters

The sermon teaches us about the importance of genuine repentance and the need for mercy in our relationship with God.

Duration: 34:50

Scripture: Matthew 18:21

Topics: "True Repentance", "Sincere Prayer"

Description

This sermon delves into the concept of true repentance and approaching God sincerely, drawing parallels from the parable of the unmerciful servant. It emphasizes the importance of genuine repentance, not driven by self-interest but by a desire for transformation and a new life in Christ. The message highlights the need for a heartfelt change of character and a true surrender to God, warning against false repentance that lacks sincerity and lasting transformation.

Transcript

And the subject is false and true praying to God. Do we approach God in a false way or in a true way, in an effective way as we call upon him for help? Now this parable before us has been known as the parable of the unmerciful servant or sometimes the unforgiving servant. This is about the kingdom of God, a distinctive kingdom, the kingdom of God's people, those who will go to and who are already in heaven.

But this term, when it's used in the Gospels, usually relates to the entrance of that kingdom and so it does here. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto. And that phrase simply means that the entrance, the means of access to the kingdom of heaven is like something.

Now first reading of this remarkable parable, and you might just think it has only a moral meaning, and that is if you are forgiven you should forgive others in turn. That is the context in which it was stated and that is the summary on the end. But all the parables of Christ also speak of the kingdom of God as something that must be entered by way of conversion and they explain in different ways how that is to be done.

There is very often a dual sense in the parable, an obvious, superficial, moral, ethical message but chiefly a redemption message, how we come to know God, how we are reconciled to him. And the reason for that was given by the Lord himself, that all his parables have something of a mystery about them because they are intended only to be understood in his time by the sincere, by the earnest. And the insincere and the proud who believe they could earn their own way into God's favour never understood these parables.

They were deliberately, and it is a stroke of genius, they were deliberately cast so that they would not be understood readily by the cynical or the doubting or the proud person. Now of course the moral meaning is easy to understand but the redemption meaning requires sincerity to grasp and then they become very plain and very clear and this is such a parable. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven or entry to the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king.

Though the king ultimately will be God, that is obvious in the parable. And the servants, well in this case governors and high ranking servants, ultimately stand for all people. And the king has determined to carry out a review of his high officials.

We know they are high officials and not lowly servants. That's easy to derive from the parable because of the huge sums of money involved, massive sums of money mentioned. Certainly not amounts of money accessible to ordinary people.

These people are servants but they are of the very highest rank. The main servant has got to be a regional or a provincial governor. The tremendous sum of money that he owes.

But we'll come to this. However this stands for all people and the review that's being carried out doesn't represent the end of the world, the day of the judgment. This is a review which is in train in the parable all the time.

So it is in life. So ultimately it is God, it is all people and all of us are under review. But we'll go to the parable first and it begins properly then in verse 24.

When he had begun, the king, to reckon, to do some investigations as to who was loyal in his service and who was not, just as God reviews us all the time, one was brought unto him, brought unto him. He didn't want to come. He didn't come voluntarily.

One was brought and a little later you find this man seems to be under arrest. It implies he's in chains because he was loosed. So he seems to be brought to the king under arrest by a detachment of military or some such.

He's brought unto the king and he owed him 10,000 talents. Now a talent was not a coin. A talent was a measurement of weight and in this case as elsewhere in the New Testament it mainly refers to a weight of gold.

And a talent and this sum of talents, this huge number, talents was equivalent to 3,000 shekels and a shekel was a Jewish silver coin which represented a day's wages, rather like the Roman denarius also represented a day's wages. Now if you calculate that up in modern terms and I'm no mathematician, I'm dependent upon other authorities for this, 10,000 talents, weights of gold of this order was equivalent to 30 million days pay. That's an incredible sum of money.

In today's money the experts tell us it's at least 3.5 to 4 billion pounds. Whoever could have a debt like that? That's massive. But to help us a little it happens to be the case that in the New Testament the term 10,000 and in classical Greek literature also is often used not for an exact sum of money but just as a way of saying an incalculable sum of money.

You might say 10,000 shekels and it simply means you're talking about an enormous sum. So we needn't bother ourselves with the exact nature of the sum but that's probably how the term is used here. But in any

case who could owe so much money? Well only somebody like a regional governor.

This is a guess but it's a very reasonable guess, a provincial governor. The king, his kingdom, wherever it was, it's a parable, it's an illustration, perhaps a large kingdom, perhaps divided into five or six or even more regions or provinces. There is a very high ranking governor of that province.

Where was this money raised? Well it may be the taxes of the province and they haven't been paid in, they haven't been forwarded. This man has lost the money. However has he lost the money? We're just left to guess.

I suppose he could have gambled it away. He could have lived a life of tremendous luxury. How he would have gambled that money I've no idea.

How he would have got through so much money but he has. Perhaps he's started businesses and bought lands of his own and his ventures have failed but whatever it is he cannot pay over the taxes, the money, whatever is due. It's a huge sum and that is the force and the power of this parable.

He squandered it away. He didn't have it and it's impossible to pay the king. Well the king obviously has shrewdly got some insight into this.

That's why he's called into account. That's why this review is going on. But let's start some application.

That's exactly how it is with us. We don't know it but we're constantly under review. We are in a sense regional governors.

Oh in our own way. What have we got? Tremendous privileges like that man. We've got the privilege of life.

Life and consciousness and enjoyment and pleasure. The capacity to see, to understand, to learn, to conduct ourselves in this world. We're not animals.

We're not rabbits or lions or anything else. We're people with all the depths of intelligence and feeling and emotion. What a fantastic privilege to be alive, to be a person, to be composed of millions of cells and minutely detailed activities going on within us to support our life and our consciousness.

What a privilege. And we're created in this universe by God but like the provincial governor towards his king, like a fool. He doesn't think of who he's supposed to be serving and nor do we.

God is just a blank space in our minds and we give him no homage. We do not seek to understand him, serve him, even less to love him. We do not honour him.

We take all his blessings and his gifts. We squander them on ourselves and in any review we have nothing to pay. No merit, nothing to offer, no refinement of character of the kind that he requires, no spiritual understanding or service.

So this parable has us described. What we do have is a massive, massive sin debt because we sin every second of our conscious day and all our life is obnoxious to God and sinful against him and the sin of unbelief. And sometimes the Lord consciously reviews us in different ways.

You may have a serious illness, you may fear for your life and just in such a moment you may wonder where you stand before the living God and you may be conscious that under his review you will be condemned and you will be discarded and justly so. It may not be an illness, it may be just somehow an experience of utter emptiness. Suddenly you run into a stone wall and something inside you says, what am I here for? What is life? My life is so empty.

What is its meaning? What is my identity? Why am I here? Where am I going? And just at such times you get an awareness that you have a debt and an obligation to your creator that you cannot pay. Or it may be tonight you hear the gospel and you're confronted with this message of God, this message of the Bible, that you rightly belong to him and you've ignored him and insulted him and spurned him and if you go on doing that you will have to pay for it. You will come under his judgement and just as you have discarded him, he will discard you and that's a frightening thought and realisation, especially when you hear about condemnation and hell and judgement.

So we're under review also. Well I come back to the parable and verse 25. But for as much as he had not nothing to pay, his lord, the king, commanded him to be sold and his wife and children and all that he had and payment to be made.

Well he's to be sold up. His family, that's what happened in those days. Of course this wouldn't have paid the king what was owed.

It was part payment and part punishment. At least the king would be within his rights. He would extract what he could and have the man sold up and in accordance with the custom of the times, he would be sold into slavery and his wife and his children and they would have to serve others for their living and all his goods and the price he fetched on the slave market possibly also would be credited to the king as at least some payment of the vast sum that was owed and that was his debt, that was his right.

They'd be treated as bankrupts. What a fall. What utter shame.

The lord high governor of the province, reduced to cleaning out pig swill somewhere, reduced to washing and cleaning and serving and his wife and his family and all his luxurious stone mansions sold up under the hammer, everything gone. What a shame. What a fall.

What humiliation for his breaking his trust and smashing the trust that was placed in him. So with us, it's true, we hear this message. Our privileges will one day be taken away.

No more pleasure. No more happiness. No more joy.

No more friendship. Nothing as all that is taken from us and we go into judgement and into everlasting pain and we are punished justly for our sin and in the meantime, slaves of this world, slaves of every passing fashion, under the judgement of God, only death lying ahead and the promulgation of the sentence and possessing no power to be reconciled with God. Nothing to make up for our sin.

We have nothing with which we can please him. So that brings us back to the parable and verse 26, the servant therefore, remember he's something like a regional governor, can't be much less, the servant therefore fell down and worshipped him. That means literally he prostrated himself on the ground, he humbled himself as he never had before and he said, Lord have patience with me and I will pay thee all.

Now that doesn't mean he promised to pay the whole debt. There was no way he could have done that. Or he says, don't send me into slavery and my family, I will pay you all that I have.

Just have mercy with me, on me, I will pay and I will live humbly and I will be a better servant and I will dedicate myself to thee. Just have mercy upon me and I will pay everything that I do have. That was what he said, that was his plea.

He's shocked, he's shaken, he's terrified of what's coming to him. Mercy is his only hope. He's very frightened, he doesn't challenge what the king says, he can't.

Many people are self-righteous to the very end but he knew there was no scope for that. He's very reverent, he's very submissive. You'd think it was a wonderful repentance.

You'd think so up till now. Well, it's the same with us but I hope our repentance is of better quality than his. We hear that we are condemned but we also hear there is mercy for those who repent.

That the King of Kings, the Most High God, pardons and forgives sinners who trust in him and who trust in Jesus Christ, equal with the Father, second person of the Trinity and what he's done to take the punishment in the place of repentant sinners. Well, the King felt for this regional governor and our God feels for us. He's provided a way of salvation for us if we believe in Christ and we need only repent and trust in what Christ has done and call for mercy and yield our lives to him and undertake that by his grace we'll do better but we can't contribute anything to our salvation.

Christ suffered the punishment of our sin for us. Do you understand that? Do you understand the need for the cross of Calvary? Why God himself must suffer our punishment for us? Now I'm going to tell you a very old preacher's illustration and I've used it many times and it's very simple and I don't mean to insult your intelligence one bit but people do find it very helpful, a very well-known preacher's illustration. This shows the need for a price to be paid for us, for our sins to be paid for by Christ himself.

There was a couple, a man and a woman, husband and wife and they lived, so the story says, in a mining village many years ago. In a day when times were hard and people had to be very, very careful in a day rather different from our own too when ordinary people didn't want to get into debt and they thought it was a very shameful thing, how different from today. However there were these two and they lived in this village but the man's wife, she could be just a little careless and she would buy a little too much here and a little too much there and she ran up quite a debt at the local village grocery store and in the old days they would keep your account in a great book on the counter and thumb the pages and there was all that you owed and the list and she made excuses, I'll pay next week, I'll pay next month and the list of what she owed grew longer and longer and longer until she realised she'd never be able to pay it and she couldn't sleep at night and she didn't tell her husband, he would be horrified and she went into that store one day and she thought any day now they're going to say nothing more, you cannot have anything more and she said to the assistant in the shop foolishly, I'll pay next week and the assistant said, pay what? She said, what I owe you, well said the assistant, you don't owe us anything, I do, no you don't and she swivelled the book round and she said, look my dear and there was a great red line drawn across the page of all the things she owed for and across it was the simple word cancel and she could scarcely believe her debt was cancelled.

Well this is helpful, simple as it is, she told her husband that night she couldn't contain herself any longer, she made a full confession that she'd been building up debt and she owed so much and she said with

great happiness and the debt is cancelled and her husband said, well somebody paid the debt, no, no, she said, nobody paid, it says cancelled. Don't you see my dear, he said, if nobody paid it then the shopkeeper paid it, somebody paid it, the debt must always be paid, it cannot disappear and it's exactly the same with the debt of our sin, it cannot disappear, this is a moral universe created by God, debt is an offence to him, it doesn't disappear, it has to be paid for, sin has to be punished, guilt has to be expurgated from God's moral universe and how can that happen? We cannot pay the debt we owe to God. Christ has come, what mercy, what amazing kindness, Christ the eternal second person of the Trinity has come into this world and he's gone to Calvary's cross and he's said to the Father, punish me instead of them, I will pay and he has paid.

And if you repent before God of all your sin and you trust in Christ, he has paid for you and your debt is cancelled, that's why we need a saviour, that's why Christ had to die, that's why we depend upon him, that's why dear friends, you must come to him. Well, I come back to this 27th, 28th verse, look at it here, the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion and loosed him, set him free from his bond, his handcuffs, his chain and forgave him altogether the debt, but wait, the wheels of officialdom move slowly, the debt in the case of the parable is not instantly cancelled. Something can go wrong and it did go wrong because we read in verse 28, the same servant or if he was this regional governor, high person with a vast debt, went out and found one of his fellow servants of much lower rank, who served him in his province, which owed him 100 pence, 100 denarii, a Roman coin in the Greek.

That's probably worth in today's money, 100 of them, 5 to 6 thousand pounds, so he's still quite an important person to be owing that money and yet it's a fraction of what his senior owed and what happened? He laid hands on him, I suppose you could do that in those days, a regional governor wouldn't dare to lay hands on a senior or junior civil servant today, but in those days you could, you could do as you liked and he very violently laid hands on him and took him even by the throat and you can imagine him shaking him and saying, pay me, that thou ow'st, pay me and he showed no compassion and his fellow servant fell down at his feet and besought him just as he had pleaded with his king, but verse 30, he would not, but went and cast him into prison till he should pay the debt. Of course he can't pay the debt while he's in prison, that means his wife has to sell his home and go round selling everything they had in order to pay up. So he treated his own underling in a cruel way, not in the way that he had been treated.

Now this is in the parable, partly as a warning to us. If we repent of our sin, if we repent we have to do it in the right spirit. Was the governor's repentance genuine? Doesn't sound like it, does it? Was he really moved by the compassion that he had been shown? Did he have any shame for his own conduct, having squandered the king's riches and rightful taxes, whatever it was? No, it appears not.

So what was the kind of spirit of his repentance when he pleaded for mercy? And the answer is, it was purely a repentance of self-interest. It was purely a repentance to avoid shame and humiliation and secure ongoing favour. There was no personal repentance, recognition of wrong, shame of his wrongdoing, appreciation of the mercy of the king, that didn't come into it.

He was worried only about his honour and comfort. Now do be careful friends, lest your repentance should be as worthless as that. You hear the gospel, that we are judged and banished from God's presence, if we die unrepentant, if we never seek him, love him, serve him.

And there are some people who hear that and they say, oh I will become a Christian, I will repent of my sin, I will ask for God's kindness. But they haven't the slightest sincerity, they're not giving him their lives,

they're not going to serve him, they're not asking him to change them and give them a new nature and a new life. They're not going to love him and live for him and learn of him.

All they want is an insurance policy to make sure they would go to heaven if they die. Or all they want is some help, I've got a difficult exam coming up they think, or a difficult future, or I'm sick and I need healing. They just want help and favour, not a new life.

They don't really want God, they don't really yield to him and his rule and his love. So be careful how you repent, you can pray in a false way, you can repent in a false way. King Saul in Old Testament times repented of his terrible conduct toward David and he said, I have sinned.

But it was just a little squall of emotion because he was touched at David's mercy towards him and he didn't mean it and in no time he was back to his furious, hateful, persecuting ways. Be careful how you repent, it must be for the right motives. Lord forgive me, I am a sinner, I make no excuse, I have sinned my life away, I have been selfish, I have broken thy commandments, I have not believed thee, I have not loved thee, I have not sought thee.

Lord I desire a new life, a new beginning, cleansing and forgiveness for all my sin, a hope of heaven and I will love thee and serve thee. Lord help me and have mercy upon me and it has to be in the right spirit, for the right reasons. You want the Lord and you know you're a sinner and you know you deserve condemnation and you want his blessing and his help.

Well what will your repentance be? Self interest only? Shadow repentance or real repentance? Now dear friends, in the parable, verse 34, his Lord was wrath and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due unto him which would be never. The regional governor, if he was such, was utterly condemned for his insincerity. And dear friends, though there is a moral, ethical message here, so likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses, so also there is a salvation lesson too.

If you think you've repented, but you're not a different person, God hasn't changed you, you haven't got a different character, just as that regional governor was forgiven, it didn't change his character. And if repentance hasn't changed your character or your life, you're not forgiven. God hasn't heard you.

There's something wrong in your approach, because if you really mean it, with all your heart, amazing things happen. Your mind is opened and you understand the gospel wonderfully and the word of God. Your heart is changed, your nature is changed and you love him and you come under his rule and you live for him.

You become a man, a woman of prayer and he hears you and you begin the adventure of the Christian life with answers to your prayers, a new beginning, a new character and communion with God and you love him and you walk with him. That's what you must search for, truly repent of your sin. Trust in Christ alone, who made an atonement for you, if you put your trust in him and ask him to remake your life and to receive you into his kingdom and with a sincere prayer, he will.

Let's pray together. Oh God, our gracious heavenly father, help each one of us. Draw us to thyself, those who have never yet sought thee, never yet found thee.

Oh Lord, help them, work in their hearts and grant that they may come to thee with great sincerity and find thee. Lord, come this night in mighty blessing and help us all, we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, for his

sake. Amen.

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