

WORKS OR FAITH, THE DOCTRINE OF MERCY

I will like to take a text of the scriptures to introduce today's sermon.

Luke 18:9-14 NASB

And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. "The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' "But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

This is a portion of the scripture that even though we know the story, most of us I believe, but the lesson is often lost in our daily lives. One of the reasons why we have lost the lesson, or maybe never imbibed it, is because we think that the doctrine of works apply only to those matters that relate to the Mosaic law. Unfortunately it is not so. There are things that constitute Christian works and relying on them for justification is still a clear and present danger.

In this story told by the Lord Jesus, we see that the aim of the people praying was to attain justification or righteousness. Righteousness is the stamp of approval that the Lord puts upon your life and which opens the door for the blessings that He may want to impart to you. Righteousness is not just an inert state of being; it is about divine approval which in turn commands blessings. It is not mainly about works but about approval. This is why you will hear Moses say something like, *"and it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the LORD our God..." Deut 6:25 NASB*. It is all about divine approval.

This is what I am saying, that when people go to God and try to claim righteousness, it is primarily because they are keen to get His approval so that they might request or demand blessings. It is upon the claim to righteousness that we are able to obtain blessings from Him. And that is why the Pharisee in the parable of the Lord Jesus started by claiming his own righteousness the way he did, and that is the way many of us do today.

We have been taught to remind God of all our giving and tithing when we want to ask for blessings, and we continue to do these good works hoping to have a full account when the time to pray would come. The girl who married as a virgin believes so strongly that to have achieved that in these perilous times, God *must* answer her with child-bearing *quick quick*. Many of us who have prospered look back and think it is all because of the effort we put into sowing the right seeds, giving relentlessly. My brethren these things are so very wrong. Read this!

Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Ps 33:18-19 KJV

The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy. Ps 147:11 KJV

I have picked these verses from the KJV because of the use of the word mercy; it is easy for us to understand that (it is the same as loving-kindness).

Please note these verses from Psalms and compare with the parable of Jesus we read at the beginning. We see that what justifies us really before the Lord is not the good works that we have done but the mercy that we hope in. This mercy is ours because of our faith in Christ Jesus. We *cannot* come to the Lord on any other basis. It is not only wrong to come on the basis of the good works we have done, it is dangerous!

Danger! Why?! You may wish to ask.

It is dangerous because once we step into the realm of works, we step into the realms of accusations that can stand against us, we step into where the Satan is very active and capable.

For every good work you have done, the Lord can count hundreds that you have not done. It will be superfluous for me at this time to get into an exegesis on the book of Job, but please read when God answered the righteous claims of Job (ch 38-41). Job was hearing God accuse him of things that he was not even aware were sins. Who would have thought that the inability to create was a sin, or being absent at creation? No wonder David exclaimed,

*If Thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with Thee... Ps 130:3-4 NASB*

The only way a person can stand before God and be justified is when he hopes in His mercy, which is expressed under the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus. No wonder the blood of the old tabernacle was sprinkled on the mercy seat. It is mercy, mercy, mercy!!

Look again at the parable of Jesus; He declared that it was the man who asked for mercy that went home justified. Remember that I explained that justification is what opens the door for blessings. It follows therefore that this man who the Pharisee referred to as a sinner is the one who will get answers before the man who thinks himself righteous.

So the wayward girl marries first, a good husband at that, and has beautiful children before the fasting and praying holy Mary. Why? Because she cried in repentance before God and begged for mercy! This God who the Bible tells abounds in mercy, so abounding in mercy that He was willing to forgive Ahab (1 Kings 21:27-29). Anyone who cries for His mercy will get it. It is those who feel they deserve what they are asking Him for that get nothing.

The fellow who has learnt all the principles of prosperity—how to give and prosper; how to enter a covenant with God for abundance, look at him and see that with all the talk, he stays in lack and in poverty. But the one who crawls to God, knowing little of these principles, and

cries like Jabez, 'O that you will bless me indeed.' This one becomes rich and has little to say in testimony more than 'I cried to the Lord, and He heard my cry.'

What is my message?

It is the same one that I have preached again and again: You cannot come to God because you think you have done something that He must reward you for. You can't. Every time you approach Him, your justification must be based upon His mercy and the shed blood of Jesus.

You are not prospering because you gave.

You did not get a good wife or good husband because you lived a holy life.

You did not get your anointing because you prayed more than other people or fasted more. To use the words of Reinhard Bonnke, it is not a purchase.

God said to the children of Israel, "I am not taking you into the promised land because of your righteousness. If that was the case, you can be sure you do not deserve it."

You got these things because of His mercy.

You will not go far in life because of what you know how to do.

You will only succeed in life because you daily acknowledge His mercy and His grace.

The reason why you have not received an answer from the Lord for that matter is because in your heart you have been holding on to something apart from the mercy of God as your claim to justification. You thought that after all the tithes you have paid, the offerings, the first-fruits, the sacrificial givings, etc. Wetin? God suppose don show by now. You have been Pharisaical in your thoughts and in your prayers, and you have not so been justified, and so your answer has been blocked.

When we do good works, let us do them because it is our duty to do them. Solomon said to fear the Lord and to keep His commandments is the whole duty of man (Eccl 12:13, Lk 17:10). Let us do them knowing that we can never do enough to merit anything. Let us do them simply because it is by them that we express our fear of God and regard for the heavenlies. Blessings however are based upon His mercy.

All good works have reward with God, but we are not to hope in the reward. We hope in His mercy. Once you mention your good works, you kill their potency.

Let us get back to the basics, and trust only in His mercy.

I think it is time to go and rearrange that prayer of yours, and stop claiming before God that you have done your part and He must do His. Just do your part, and ask for mercy.

It is written, "*mercy triumphs over judgement*"