

THE JESUS PRAYER
Luke 18: 9-14 March 2, 2014 Communion
Last in a Series: "Secrets of the Blessed Life"
The Church of the Covenant

"The Jesus Prayer" is a prayer prayed in the words of scripture that serves as a wonderful centering device as we seek to enter into the presence of the Lord God. I was speaking to one of the greats in spiritual leadership in our nation, who it is specifically is of no particular importance, but I was asking one of those too-long, convoluted questions that really aren't questions but statements about attempting to experience God and by the way, "How is that done?" This wise person didn't answer the question but rather asked: "What does the Bible say?" I answered we are to enter into our prayer closet as the Bible says and pray to our God in secret. This person said a one word response to this – "Exactly". This propelled me on a mission where, praise God, my prayer life has deepened and become rich and exciting, where indeed I experience God and am led by His voice. 25 years of ministry and I finally did what the Bible says. The last and best "Secret of the Blessed Life" is being in the presence of the Spirit of the Living God, speaking and listening, enjoying that presence forever. "The Jesus Prayer" is a centering device to use when we retreat into our prayer closet, close the door to the busy-ness of life, focus our heart on the Almighty, and finally take the time we need to take to enter into God's presence. There is power in and of itself in scripture and there is power in and of itself in prayer and there is power in and of itself in the presence, so when you combine these three things –scripture, prayer and God's presence—there is a powerful, powerful , *spiritually* powerful result.

"The Jesus Prayer" comes from Luke 18: 13 and it is modified in this way. I pray: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." And I keep repeating it until all those internal voices in my head --you should be working not sitting here; you have too much to do today; all the bla-bla-bla rehashing of conversations with people and the things I woulda and shoulda and coulda done—until all those tapes of all those conversations cease. Then I am quiet in the presence of God. My spiritual ears are open and my physical ears are shut. The distractions of life are at bay. I am ready to listen to what God will show me, but it takes me quieting my soul, it takes me focusing exclusively on Him, it requires me shutting my own self down in order to experience all of the fullness of God in His presence. Any piece of scripture can function in this way –"*Be still and know that I am God*". "Our Father, who art in heaven..." "For God so loved the world..." "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..." But for me "The Jesus Prayer" is especially helpful. First, it says who Christ is. "Lord Jesus Christ..." He is Lord; I am not Lord. He is the One to follow as Lord; the whims of my life are not to be followed. He is Lord and deserves to sit on the throne of my life, not my own ego. "Lord Jesus Christ..." He is Jesus; He IS salvation. His name says it all; HE has come today into my prayer life to save me from myself. He is Christ; He is *Christos* in the Greek. He is the anointed One; He is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. He is Messiah and King and Lord of Lords...and I am not. What I want is not important; what HE wants is paramount. Who HE is begins the Jesus Prayer. "...a sinner" is how it concludes. That is who I am. I am by my human nature at odds with Him. I sin only against Him in things done and in things left undone. "*All have fallen short of the glory of God*" Everyone is a sinner. None is good apart from HIM. We delude ourselves that we are a basically good person, not like those other people over there. We are better than "them", whoever "them" may be. No, I am a sinner and you are a sinner and the people sitting in the church pews today are sinners and the people who slept in and aren't here are sinners and the people out there in the world waiting to hear about Jesus who never have yet met the Savior of the world, they are sinners. We are all sinners in need of Jesus. We are all just fallen and broken people in need of mercy. He is Lord, Savior, Salvation and Messiah; He is the Son

of God. We are a sinner standing in the need of a mercy that only HE can give. My prayers to God were always the laundry list of my wants, desires and requests, asked from a sinful human heart. I didn't even know what to ask for, so tainted with sin were my requests. I asked for the wrong things and so was disappointed when I didn't receive them. This "prayer thing" doesn't work; God doesn't grant me what I think I want' and if it doesn't work then the heck with you, God. Beloved, it didn't work because we never actually tried it. I thought that Jesus was somehow there as my spiritual lapdog to do whatever I requested just because I asked and just because I'm such a good person after all. No, even my prayers were infused with sin and self interest, my ego wanting God to do what I, me, myself, my own ego, wanted God to do. No, JESUS, HE is Lord and I am not. I am to follow HIM; He is not to follow me. "The Jesus Prayer" prepares my heart to listen for His will and not my own ego.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me a sinner. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And now that we have who we are and who we are not, and we have who HE is and who HE wants to be in our life, Now, and only now, are we ready to pray... Takes me at least 25 minutes to get me out of myself and into His presence... Now I am ready to pray...You shake your fist at heaven and are angry because "this prayer thing didn't work"; I prayed but God didn't answer; I asked, but God, You didn't do what I wanted you to do!" Maybe, just maybe, you didn't first practice the presence of God; maybe you were too busy to wait upon God; God, here's 30 seconds, do what I want you to do; maybe, just maybe, you never got beyond your own sin-tinged desires to consider the desires of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God...

What an interesting piece of scripture this is for us today from Luke 18. It is often referred to as Jesus' parable of the "Pharisee and the Publican". The Pharisee as it says "*trusted in (himself) that (he was) righteous*" (Luke 18: 9) People who are self-righteous have no need of God; they have it all figured out; they do what they believe is right in their own eyes, never searching the scriptures or really entering into prayer, lest they discover they are not righteous. And by the way, Jesus is right in this as well, out of their own self-righteousness they "despised others". People who try to make themselves good on their own and apart from Jesus always have to find someone else to put down; they have to push someone else down in order to feel better about themselves and lift themselves up. So there are two people in Jesus' story praying in the temple. Note that the Pharisee actually isn't praying at all. Yes, he may address his prayer to God but he is not actually talking to God, he is talking to himself. "Thank you, God, that I am not like these other people—he's actually just saying this to himself—and then he trots out the litany of all the good things that he does and so that's why God ought to listen to him and answer his prayer—I fast and don't eat food I am so holy; I tithe to the temple, so You ought to listen to me, God." No, the god whom he addresses in his prayer is himself. He is his own god. It is his ego which sits on the throne of his own life. He's talking to himself and telling himself what a good person he is. Consider this inverted Jesus Prayer --"Lord, Pharisee, the pray-er, fast-er and tither, I have no need of mercy, because I am not a sinner." So many people's prayers are not prayers; they are just an internal conversation with in their own heads; they are sermons addressed to others, not themselves. But the Publican, the one whom everyone in the temple knows is a sinner, standing far off, would not even lift his eyes up to heaven, but beat his breast and prayed, "*God, be merciful to me a sinner.*" (Luke 18: 13) Who entered into the presence of God that day? Who actually prayed to God versus who was just speaking to themselves? --The Pharisee or the Publican?

I am amused when someone tells me something like, "I like to pray on the golf course." Or "I like to pray while I'm driving." Really? My view of golf is that you have to really concentrate on the game or you're not going to do very well at it. How can you concentrate on golf and concentrate on God at the same time? You'll probably "miss the put" where God is concerned too. You like to pray while you're driving

your car down I-79 at 70 mph? If people can't safely text and drive, or put on their makeup and drive, or read the newspaper and drive, why would we suspect they can really focus on God and drive? Better not close your eyes doing 70 mph on I 79. And by the way, what if God actually spoke to you while driving? What if, like the Apostle Paul, He blinded you on the road to Damascus? Can you really pray and drive at the same time? Or are the distractions of life the sin that stop us from practicing the presence of God? Are the thought patterns that think we can fit God into our busy life as an afterthought a manifestation of our sinful nature?

Are we praying to God like the Publican? Or are we just having an internal conversation within our own head like the Pharisee?

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, who died on a cross for me and my sin, please, please, please, get me outside myself and into Your Holy presence today. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, come to us now in this sacrament, for indeed we are coming to You. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us, please, for we are just all sinners, standing in the need of prayer, needing Your Son to be our Savior and Lord, needing a living presence in our life that only You can give. *"God, be merciful to me, a sinner."* His presence discovered in prayer is a secret of the blessed life. And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*