

CHAPTER 18

In this chapter we have,

- I.** The parable of the importunate widow, designed to teach us fervency in prayer (v. 1-8).
- II.** The parable of the Pharisee and publican, designed to teach us humility, and humiliation for sin, in prayer (v. 9-14).
- III.** Christ's favour to little children that were brought to him (v. 15-17).
- IV.** The trial of a rich man that had a mind to follow Christ, whether he loved better Christ or his riches; his coming short upon that trial; and Christ's discourse with his disciples upon that occasion (v. 18-30).
- V.** Christ's foretelling his own death and sufferings (v. 31-34).
- VI.** His restoring sight to a blind man (v. 35-43). And these four passages we had before in Matthew and Mark.

LUKE 18:1-8

THE UNJUST JUDGE

This parable has its key hanging at the door; the drift and design of it are *prefixed*. Christ spoke it with this intent, to teach us that *men ought always to pray and not to faint*, v. 1. It supposes that all God's people are *praying* people; all God's children keep up both a *constant* and an *occasional* correspondence with him, send to him *statedly*, and upon *every emergency*. It is our privilege and honour that we *may* pray. It is our duty; we *ought to pray*, we sin if we neglect it. It is to be our constant work; we *ought always* to pray, it is that which *the duty of every day requires*. We must pray, and never grow weary of praying, nor think of leaving it off till it comes to be swallowed up in everlasting praise. But that which seems particularly designed here is to teach us constancy and perseverance in our requests for some spiritual mercies that we are in pursuit of, relating either to ourselves or to the church of God. When we are praying for strength against our spiritual enemies, our lusts and corruptions, which are our

worst enemies, we must continue instant in prayer, must pray and *not faint*, for we shall not *seek God's face in vain*. So we must likewise in our prayers for the deliverance of the people of God out of the hands of their persecutors and oppressors.

I. Christ shows, by a parable, the *power of importunity* among men, who will be swayed by that, when nothing else will influence, to do what is just and right. He gives you an instance of an honest cause that succeeded before an unjust judge, not by the equity or compassionableness of it, but purely by *dint of importunity*. Observe here,

1. The bad character of the judge that was in a certain city. He *neither feared God nor regarded man*; he had no manner of concern either for his conscience or for his reputation; he stood in no awe either of the wrath of God against him or of the censures of men concerning him: or, he took no care to do his duty either to God or man; he was a perfect stranger both to godliness and honour, and had no notion of either. It is not strange if those that have cast off the fear of their Creator be altogether regardless of their fellow-creatures; where no *fear of God* is no good is to be expected. Such a prevalency of irreligion and inhumanity is bad in any, but very bad in a *judge*, who has power in his hand, in the use of which he ought to be guided by the principles of religion and justice, and, if he be not, instead of doing good with his power he will be in danger of doing hurt. *Wickedness in the place of judgment* was one of the sorest evils Solomon saw under the sun, ⁽²¹¹⁶⁾ Ecclesiastes 3:16.

2. The distressed case of a poor widow that was necessitated to make her appeal to him, being wronged by some one that thought to bear her down with power and terror. She had manifestly right on her side; but, it should seem, in soliciting to have right done her, she tied not herself to the formalities of the law, but made personal application to the judge from day to day at his own house, still crying, *Avenge me of mine adversary*; that is, *Do me justice against mine adversary*; not that she desired to be revenged on him for any thing he had done against her, but that he might be obliged to restore what effects he had of hers in his hands, and might be disabled any more to oppress her. Note, Poor widows have often many adversaries, who barbarously take advantage of their weak and helpless state to invade their rights, and defraud them of what little they have; and magistrates are particularly charged, not only not to do *violence to the widow* (⁽²¹¹⁷⁾ Jeremiah 21:3), but to *judge the fatherless*, and *plead for the widow* (⁽²¹¹⁷⁾ Isaiah 1:17),

to be their patrons and protectors; then they are *as gods*, for God is so,
Psalm 68:5.

3. The difficulty and discouragement she met with in her cause: *He would not for awhile*. According to his usual practice, he frowned upon her, took no notice of her cause, but connived at all the wrong her adversary did her; for she had no bribe to give him, no great man whom he stood in any awe of to speak for her, so that he did not at all incline to redress her grievances; and he himself was conscience of the reason of his dilatoriness, and could not but own within himself that he *neither feared God nor regarded man*. It is sad that a man should know so much amiss of himself, and be in no care to amend it.

4. The gaining of her point by continually *dunning* this unjust *judge* (v. 5): "*Because this widow troubleth me*, gives me a continual toil, I will hear her cause, and do her justice; not so much lest by her clamour against me she bring me into an ill name, as lest by her clamour to me she weary me; for she is resolved that she will give me no rest till it is done, and therefore I will do it, to save myself further trouble; as good at first as at last." Thus she got justice done her by continual craving; she begged it at his door, followed him in the streets, solicited him in open court, and still her cry was, *Avenge me of mine adversary*, which he was forced to do, to get rid of her; for his conscience, bad as he was, would not suffer him to send her to prison for an affront upon the court.

II. He applies this for the encouragement of God's praying people to pray with faith and fervency, and to persevere therein.

1. He assures them that God will at length be gracious to them (v. 6): *Hear what the unjust judge saith*, how he owns himself quite overcome by a constant importunity, *and shall not God avenge his own elect?* Observe,

(1.) What it is that they desire and expect: that God would *avenge his own elect*. Note,

[1.] There are a people in the world that are God's people, his *elect*, his *own elect*, a choice people, a chosen people. And this he has an eye to in all he does for them; it is because they are his *chosen*, and in pursuance of the choice he has made of them.

[2.] God's own elect meet with a great deal of trouble and opposition in this world; there are *many adversaries* that fight against them; Satan is their great adversary.

[3.] That which is wanted and waited for is God's preserving and protecting them, and the work of his hands in them; his securing the interest of the church in the world and his grace in the heart.

(2.) What it is that is required of God's people in order to the obtaining of this: they must *cry day and night to him*; not that he needs their remonstrances, or can be moved by their pleadings, but this he has made their duty, and to this he has promised mercy. We ought to be particular in praying against our spiritual enemies, as St. Paul was: *For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me*; like this importunate widow. Lord, mortify *this* corruption. Lord, arm me against *this* temptation. We ought to concern ourselves for the persecuted and oppressed churches, and to pray that God would do them justice, and set them in safety. And herein we must be very urgent; we must *cry* with earnestness: we must *cry day and night*, as those that believe prayer will be heard at last; we must *wrestle with God*, as those that know how to value the blessing, and will have no nay. God's praying people are told to *give him no rest*, ²⁵¹⁶ Isaiah 62:6, 7.

(3.) What discouragements they may perhaps meet with in their prayers and expectations. He may *bear long with them*, and may not presently appear for them, in answer to their prayers. He is *makrothymon ep' autois* — he *exercises patience towards* the adversaries of his people, and does not take vengeance on them; and he *exercises the patience of his people*, and does not plead for them. He *bore long* with the *cry of the sin* of the Egyptians that oppressed Israel, and with the *cry of the sorrows* of those that were oppressed.

(4.) What assurance they have that mercy will come at last, though it be delayed, and how it is supported by what the unjust judge saith: If this widow prevail by being importunate, much more shall God's elect prevail. For,

[1.] This widow was a *stranger*, nothing related to the judge; but God's praying people are his own elect, whom he knows, and loves, and delights in, and has always concerned himself for.

[2.] She was but *one*, but the praying people of God are *many*, all of whom come to him on the same errand, and agree to ask what they need, ~~489~~ Matthew 18:19. As the saints of heaven surround the throne of glory with their united praises, so saints on earth besiege the throne of grace with their united prayers.

[3.] She came to a *judge* that bade her *keep her distance*; we come to a *Father* that bids us *come boldly to him*, and teaches us to cry, *Abba, Father*.

[4.] She came to an *unjust judge*; we come to a *righteous Father* (~~492~~ John 17:25), one that regards his own glory and the comforts of his poor creatures, especially those in distress, as *widows and fatherless*.

[5.] She came to this judge purely upon her own account; but God is himself engaged in the cause which we are soliciting; and we can say, *Arise, O Lord, plead thine own cause*; and *what wilt thou do to thy great name?*

[6.] She had no friend to speak for her, to add force to her petition, and to use interest for her more than her own; but we have an *Advocate with the Father*, his own Son, who *ever lives to make intercession* for us, and has a powerful prevailing interest in heaven.

[7.] She had no promise of speeding, no, nor any encouragement given her to ask; but we have the golden sceptre held out to us, are told to ask, with a promise that it shall be given to us.

[8.] She could have access to the judge only at some certain times; but we may cry to God *day and night*, at all hours, and therefore may the rather hope to prevail by importunity.

[9.] Her importunity was provoking to the judge, and she might fear lest it should set him more against her; but our importunity is pleasing to God; the prayer of the upright is *his delight*, and therefore, we may hope, shall avail much, if it be an effectual fervent prayer.

2. He intimates to them that, notwithstanding this, they will begin to be weary of waiting for him (v. 8): “*Nevertheless, though such assurances are given that God will avenge his own elect, yet, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*” The Son of man will come to *avenge his own elect*, to plead the cause of persecuted Christians against

the persecuting Jews; he will come in his providence to plead the cause of his injured people in every age, and at the great day he will come finally to determine the controversies of Zion. Now, when he comes, will he find faith on the earth? The question implies a strong negation: No, he will not; he himself foresees it.

(1.) This supposes that it is *on earth* only that there is occasion for *faith*; for sinners in hell are *feeling* that which they would not believe, and saints in heaven are *enjoying* that which they did believe.

(2.) It supposes that *faith* is the great thing that Jesus Christ *looks for*. He *looks down* upon the children of men, and does not ask, Is there innocency? but, *Is there faith?* He enquired concerning the faith of those who applied themselves to him for cures.

(3.) It supposes that if there were faith, though ever so little, he would discover it, and *find it out*. His eye is upon the weakest and most obscure believer.

(4.) It is foretold that, when Christ comes to plead his people's cause, he will find but *little faith* in comparison with what one might expect. That is,

[1.] In general, he will find but *few good people*, few that are really and truly good. Many that have the form and fashion of godliness, but few that have faith, that are sincere and honest: nay, he will find little *fidelity* among men; the *faithful fail*, ^{<901>}Psalm 12:1, 2. Even to the end of time there will still be occasion for the same complaint. The world will grow no better, no, not when it is drawing towards its period. Bad it is, and bad it will be, and worst of all just before Christ's coming; the last times will be the most perilous.

[2.] In particular, he will find few that have *faith* concerning his coming. When he comes to *avenge his own elect* he looks if there be any faith *to help* and *to uphold*, and wonders that there is none, ^{<256>}Isaiah 59:16; 63:5. It intimates that Christ, both in his particular comings for the relief of his people, and in his general coming at the end of time, may, and will, delay his coming so long as that, *First*, Wicked people will begin to *defy it*, and to say, *Where is the promise of his coming?* ^{<104>}2 Peter 3:4. They will challenge him to come (^{<250>}Isaiah 5:10; ^{<309>}Amos 5:19); and his delay will harden them in their wickedness, ^{<1248>}Matthew 24:48. *Secondly*, Even his own people will begin to *despair* of it, and to conclude he will never

come, because he has passed their reckoning. God's time to appear for his people is when things are brought to the last extremity, and when Zion begins to say, *The Lord has forsaken me*. See ~~2844~~ Isaiah 49:14; 40:27. But this is our comfort, that, when the time appointed comes, it will appear that the unbelief of man has not made the promise of God of no effect.

~~2844~~ LUKE 18:9-14

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

The scope of this parable likewise is prefixed to it, and we are told (v. 9) who they were whom it was levelled at, and for whom it was calculated. He designed it for the conviction of some who *trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others*. They were such as had,

- 1.** A great conceit of themselves, and of their own goodness; they thought themselves as holy as they needed to be, and holier than all their neighbours, and such as might serve for examples to them all. But that was not all;
- 2.** They had a confidence in themselves before God, and not only had a high opinion of their own righteousness, but depended upon the merit of it, whenever they addressed God, as their plea: They *trusted in themselves as being righteous*; they thought they had made God their debtor, and might demand any thing from him; and,
- 3.** They despised others, and looked upon them with contempt, as not worthy to be compared with them. Now Christ by this parable would show such their folly, and that thereby they shut themselves out from acceptance with God. This is called a *parable*, though there be nothing of similitude in it; but it is rather a description of the different temper and language of those that *proudly justify themselves*, and those that *humbly condemn themselves*; and their different standing before God. It is matter of fact every day.

L. Here are both these addressing themselves to the duty of prayer at the same place and time (v. 10): *Two men went up into the temple* (for the temple stood upon a hill) *to pray*. It was not the hour of public prayer, but they went thither to offer up their personal devotions, as was usual with

good people at that time, when the temple was not only the *place*, but the *medium* of worship, and God had promised, in answer to Solomon's request, that, whatever prayer was made in a right manner *in* or *towards* that house, it should *therefore* the rather be accepted. Christ is our temple, and to him we must have an eye in all our approaches to God. The *Pharisees* and the *publican* both went to *the temple to pray*. Note, Among the worshippers of God, in the visible church, there is a mixture of good and bad, of some that are accepted of God, and some that are not; and so it has been ever since Cain and Abel brought their offering to the same altar. The Pharisee, proud as he was, could not think himself above prayer; nor could the publican, humble as he was, think himself shut out from the benefit of it; but we have reason to think that these went with different views.

1. The Pharisee went *to the temple* to pray because it was a *public* place, more public than the corners of the streets, and therefore he should have many eyes upon him, who would applaud his devotion, which perhaps was more than was expected. The character Christ gave of the Pharisees, that *all their works they did to be seen of men*, gives us occasion for this suspicion. Note, Hypocrites keep up the external performances of religion only to *save* or *gain* credit. There are many whom we see *every day* at the temple, whom, it is to be feared, we shall not see in the great day at Christ's right hand.

2. The publican went to the temple because it was appointed to be a *house of prayer for all people*, ²⁸⁰¹Isaiah 56:7. The Pharisee came to the temple upon a *compliment*, the publican upon business; the Pharisee to make his appearance, the publican to make his request. Now God sees with what disposition and design we come to wait upon him in holy ordinances, and will judge of us accordingly.

II. Here is the Pharisee's address to God (for a prayer I cannot call it): He *stood* and *prayed thus with himself* (v. 11, 12): *standing by himself*, *he prayed thus*, so some read it; he was wholly intent upon himself, had nothing in his eye but *self*, his own praise, and not God's glory; or, standing in some conspicuous place, where he distinguished himself; or, *setting himself* with a great deal of state and formality, he prayed thus. Now that which he is here supposed to say is that which shows,

1. That he *trusted to himself that he was righteous*. A great many good things he said of himself, which we will suppose to be true. He was free from gross and scandalous sins; he was not an *extortioner*, not a usurer, not oppressive to debtors or tenants, but fair and kind to all that had dependence upon him. He was not *unjust* in any of his dealings; he did no man any wrong; he could say, as Samuel, *Whose ox or whose ass have I taken?* He was *no adulterer*, but had possessed his vessel in sanctification and honour. Yet this was not all; he *fasted twice in the week*, as an act partly of temperance, partly of devotion. The Pharisees and their disciples fasted twice a week, Monday and Thursday. Thus he glorified God with his body: yet that was not all; he *gave tithes of all that he possessed*, according to the law, and so glorified God with his worldly estate. Now all this was very well and commendable. Miserable is the condition of those who come short of the righteousness of this Pharisee: yet he was not accepted; and why was he not?

(1.) His giving God thanks for this, though in itself a good thing, yet seems to be a mere formality. He does not say, *By the grace of God I am what I am*, as Paul did, but turns it off with a slight, *God, I thank thee*, which is intended but for a plausible introduction to a proud vainglorious ostentation of himself.

(2.) He makes his boast of this, and dwells with delight upon this subject, as if all his business to the temple was to tell God Almighty how very good he was; and he is ready to say, with those hypocrites that we read of (²⁸⁰⁸ *Isaiah 58:3*), *Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not?*

(3.) He *trusted* to it as a righteousness, and not only mentioned it, but pleaded it, as if hereby he had merited at the hands of God, and made him his debtor.

(4.) Here is not one word of prayer in all he saith. He went *up to the temple to pray*, but forgot his errand, was so full of himself and his own goodness that he thought he had need of nothing, no, not of the favour and grace of God, which, it would seem, he did not think worth asking.

2. That he *despised others*.

(1.) He thought meanly of all mankind but himself: *I thank thee that I am not as other men are*. He speaks indefinitely, as if he were better than any. We may have reason to thank God that we are not as *some men* are, that

are notoriously wicked and vile; but to speak at random thus, as if *we* only were good, and all besides us were reprobates, is to judge by wholesale.

(2.) He thought meanly in a particular manner of this publican, whom he had left behind, it is probable, in the court of the Gentiles, and whose company he had fallen into as he came to the temple. He knew that he was a publican, and therefore very uncharitably concluded that he was an *extortioner, unjust*, and all that is naught. Suppose it had been so, and he had known it, what business had he to take notice of it? Could not he *say his prayers* (and that was all that the Pharisees did) without reproaching his neighbours? Or was this a part of his *God, I thank thee*? And was he as much pleased with the publican's badness as with his own goodness? There could not be a plainer evidence, not only of the want of humility and charity, but of reigning pride and malice, than this was.

III. Here is the publican's address to God, which was the reverse of the Pharisee's, as full of *humility and humiliation* as his was of *pride and ostentation*; as full of *repentance* for sin, and *desire* towards God, as his was of *confidence* in *himself* and his own righteousness and sufficiency.

1. He expressed his repentance and humility in *what he did*; and his gesture, when he addressed himself to his devotions, was *expressive* of great seriousness and humility, and the proper clothing of a broken, penitent, and obedient heart.

(1.) He *stood afar off*. The Pharisee *stood*, but crowded up as high as he could, to the upper end of the court; the publican *kept at a distance* under a sense of his unworthiness to draw near to God, and perhaps for fear of offending the Pharisee, whom he observed to look scornfully upon him, and of disturbing his devotions. Hereby he owned that God might justly *behold him afar off*, and send him into a state of eternal distance from him, and that it was a great favour that God was pleased to admit him *thus nigh*.

(2.) He *would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven*, much less his *hands*, as was usual in prayer. He did *lift up his heart* to God in the heavens, in *holy desires*, but, through prevailing shame and humiliation, he did not lift up his eyes in *holy confidence and courage*. His *iniquities are gone over his head, as a heavy burden*, so that he is *not able to look up*, ^{^{Psalm 40:12.} The dejection of his looks is an indication of the dejection of his mind at the thought of sin.}

(3.) He *smote upon his breast*, in a holy indignation at himself for sin: “Thus would I smite this wicked heart of mine, the poisoned fountain out of which flow all the streams of sin, if I could come at it.” The sinner's heart first smites him in a penitent rebuke, ^{2SAM}2 Samuel 24:10. *David's heart smote him*. Sinner, what hast thou done? And then he smites his heart with penitent remorse: *O wretched man that I am?* Ephraim is said to *smite upon his thigh*, ^{2SER}Jeremiah 31:19. Great mourners are represented *tabouring upon their breasts*, Nah. 2:7.

2. He expressed it *in what he said*. His prayer was *short*. Fear and shame hindered him from saying much; sighs and groans swallowed up his words; but what he said was to the purpose: *God, be merciful to me a sinner*. And blessed be God that we have this prayer upon record as an answered prayer, and that we are sure that he who prayed it went to his house justified; and so shall we, if we pray it, as he did, through Jesus Christ: “*God, be merciful to me a sinner*; the God of infinite mercy be merciful to me, for, if he be not, I am for ever undone, for ever miserable. God be merciful to me, for I have been cruel to myself.”

(1.) He owns himself *a sinner* by nature, by practice, guilty before God. *Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee?* The Pharisee denies himself to be a *sinner*; none of his neighbours can charge him, and he sees no reason to charge himself, with any thing amiss; *he is clean, he is pure from sin*. But the publican gives himself no other character than that of a *sinner*, a convicted criminal at God's bar.

(2.) He has no dependence but upon the *mercy of God*, that, and that only, he relies upon. The Pharisee had insisted upon the *merit* of his fastings and tithes; but the poor publican disclaims all thought of merit, and flies to mercy as his city of refuge, and takes hold of the horn of that altar. “Justice condemns me; nothing will save me but mercy, mercy.”

(3.) He earnestly prays for the benefit of that mercy: “*O God, be merciful, be propitious, to me*; forgive my sins; be reconciled to me; take me into thy favour; receive me graciously; love me freely.” He comes as a beggar for an alms, when he is ready to perish for hunger. Probably he repeated this prayer with renewed affections, and perhaps said more to the same purport, made a particular confession of his sins, and mentioned the particular mercies he wanted, and waited upon God for; but still this was the burden of the song: *God, be merciful to me a sinner*.

IV. Here is the publican's *acceptance with God*. We have seen how differently these two addressed themselves to God; it is now worth while to enquire how they sped. There were those who would cry up the Pharisee, by whom he would go to his house applauded, and who would look with contempt upon this sneaking whining publican. But our Lord Jesus, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secret is hid, who is perfectly acquainted with all proceedings in the court of heaven, assures us that this poor, penitent, broken-hearted publican *went to his house justified, rather than the other*. The Pharisee thought that if one of them must be justified, and not the other, certainly it must be he rather than the publican. "No," saith Christ, "*I tell you*, I affirm it with the utmost assurance, and declare it to you with the utmost concern, *I tell you*, it is the publican rather than the Pharisee." The proud Pharisee goes away, rejected of God; his thanksgivings are so far from being accepted that they are an *abomination*; he is *not justified*, his sins are not pardoned, nor is he delivered from condemnation: he is not accepted as righteous in God's sight, because he is so righteous in his own sight; but the publican, upon this humble address to Heaven, obtains the remission of his sins, and he whom the Pharisee would not set *with the dogs of his flock* God sets with the *children of his family*. The reason given for this is because God's glory is to *resist the proud, and give grace to the humble*.

1. Proud men, who *exalt themselves*, are *rivals with God*, and therefore *they shall certainly be abased*. God, in his discourse with Job, appeals to this proof that he is God, that he *looks upon every one that is proud, and brings him low*, ^{180D}Job 40:12.

2. Humble men, who *abase themselves*, are *subject to God*, and they shall be *exalted*. God has preferment in store for those that will take it as a favour, not for those that demand it as a debt. He shall be *exalted* into the love of God, and communion with him, shall be exalted into a satisfaction in himself, and exalted at last as high as heaven. See how the punishment answers the sin: *He that exalteth himself shall be abased*. See how the recompence answers the duty: *He that humbles himself shall be exalted*. See also the power of God's grace in bringing good out of evil; the publican had been a great sinner, and out of the greatness of his sin was brought the greatness of his repentance; *out of the eater came forth meat*. See, on the contrary, the power of Satan's malice in bringing evil out of good. It was good that the Pharisee was no extortioner, nor unjust; but the devil made him proud of this, to his ruin.

LUKE 18:15-17

CHRIST'S ATTENTION TO CHILDREN

This passage of story we had both in Matthew and Mark; it very fitly follows here after the story of the publican, as a confirmation of the truth which was to be illustrated by that parable, that those shall be accepted with God, and honoured, who humble themselves, and for them Christ has *blessings in store*, the choicest and best of blessings. Observe here,

1. Those who are themselves blessed in Christ should desire to have their children also blessed in him, and should hereby testify the true honour they have for Christ, by their making use of him, and the true love they have for their children, by their concern about their souls. They brought to him *infants*, very young, not able to go, sucking children, as some think. None are too little, too young, to bring to Christ, who knows how to show kindness to them that are not capable of doing service to him.

2. One gracious touch of Christ's will make our children happy. They *brought infants to him, that he might touch them* in token of the application of his grace and Spirit to them, for that always makes way for his *blessing*, which likewise they expected: see ^{234B}Isaiah 44:3. *I will first pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and then my blessing upon thine offspring.*

3. It is no strange thing for those who make their application to Jesus Christ, for themselves or for their children, to meet with discouragement, even from those who should countenance and encourage them: *When the disciples saw it*, they thought, if this were admitted, it would bring endless trouble upon their Master, and therefore they *rebuked them*, and frowned upon them. The spouse complained of *the watchmen*, ^{238B}Song of Solomon 3:3; v. 7.

4. Many whom the disciples rebuke the Master invites: *Jesus called them unto him*, when, upon the disciples' check, they were retiring. They did not *appeal* from the disciples to the Master, but the Master took cognizance of their despised cause.

5. It is the mind of Christ that *little children* should be brought to him, and presented as living sacrifices to his honour: "*Suffer little children to come to me, and forbid them not*; let nothing be done to hinder them, for they

shall be as welcome as any.” *The promise is to us, and to our seed;* and therefore he that has the dispensing of promised blessings will bid them welcome to him with us.

6. The children of those who belong to the kingdom of God do likewise belong to that kingdom, as the children of freemen are freemen. If the parents be members of the visible church, the children are so too; for, if the root be holy, the branches are so.

7. So welcome are *children* to Christ that those grown people are most welcome to him who have in them most of the disposition of children (v. 17): *Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child,* that is, receive the benefits of it with humility and thankfulness, not pretending to merit them as the Pharisee did, but gladly owning himself indebted to free grace for them, as the publican did; unless a man be brought to this self-denying frame he shall *in no wise enter* into that kingdom. They must receive the kingdom of God as *children*, receive their estates by descent and inheritance, not by purchase, and call it their Father's gift.

LUKE 18:18-30

RICHES A SPIRITUAL HINDRANCE

In these verses we have,

I. Christ's discourse with a ruler, that had a good mind to be directed by him in the way to heaven. In which we may observe,

1. It is a blessed sight to see persons of distinction in the world distinguish themselves from others of their rank by their concern about their souls and another life. Luke takes notice of it that he was a *ruler*. Few of the rulers had any esteem for Christ, but here was one that had; whether a church or state ruler does not appear, but he was one *in authority*.

2. The great thing we are every one of us concerned to enquire after is what we shall do to get to heaven, *what we shall do to inherit eternal life*. This implies such a belief of an eternal life after this as atheists and infidels have not, such a concern to make it sure as a careless unthinking world have not, and such a willingness to comply with any terms that it

may be made sure as those have not who are resolutely devoted to the world and the flesh.

3. Those who would inherit eternal life must apply themselves to Jesus Christ as their *Master*, their *teaching* Master, so it signifies here (*didaskale*), and their *ruling* Master, and so they shall certainly find him. There is no learning the way to heaven but in the school of Christ, by those that enter themselves into it, and continue in it.

4. Those who come to Christ as their Master must believe him to have not only a *divine mission*, but a *divine goodness*. Christ would have this ruler know that if he understood himself aright in calling him good he did, in effect, call him *God* and indeed he was so (v. 19): “*Why callest thou me good? Thou knowest there is none good but one, that is, God; and dost thou then take me for God? If so, thou art in the right.*”

5. Our Master, Christ himself, has not altered the way to heaven from what it was before his coming, but has only made it more plain, and easy, and comfortable, and provided for our relief, in case we take any false step. *Thou knowest the commandments*. Christ came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to establish them. Wouldest thou inherit eternal life? Govern thyself by the commandments.

6. The duties of the second table must be conscientiously observed, in order to our happiness, and we must not think that any acts of devotion, how plausible soever, will atone for the neglect of them. Nor is it enough to keep ourselves free from the gross violations of these commandments, but we must *know these commandments*, as Christ has *explained them* in his sermon upon the mount, in their extent and spiritual nature, and so observe them.

7. Men think themselves *innocent* because they are *ignorant*; so this ruler did. He said, *All these have I kept from my youth up*, v. 21. He knows no more evil of himself than the Pharisee did, v. 11. He boasts that he began *early* in a course of virtue, that he had continued in it to this day, and that he had not in any instance transgressed. Had he been acquainted with the extent and spiritual nature of the divine law, and with the workings of his own heart, — had he been but Christ's disciples awhile, and learned of him, he would have said quite the contrary: “*All these have I broken from my youth up, in thought, word, and deed.*”

8. The great things by which we are to try our spiritual state are how we stand affected to Christ and to our brethren, to this world and to the other; by these this man was tried. For,

(1.) If we have a true *affection to Christ*, he will *come and follow him*, will attend to his doctrine, and submit to his discipline, whatever it cost him. None shall inherit eternal life who are not willing to take their lot with the Lord Jesus, to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes.

(2.) If he have a true *affection to his brethren*, he will, as there is occasion, *distribute to the poor*, who are God's receivers of his dues out of our estates.

(3.) If he think meanly of *this world*, as he ought, he will not stick at *selling what he has*, if there be a necessity for it, for the relief of God's poor.

(4.) If he think highly of the other world, as he ought, he will desire no more than to have *treasure in heaven*, and will reckon that a sufficient abundant recompence for all that he has left, or lost, or laid out for God in this world.

9. There are many that have a great deal in them that is very commendable, and yet they perish *for the lack of some one thing*; so this ruler here; he broke with Christ upon this, he liked all his terms very well but this which would part between him and his estate: "In this, I pray thee, have me excused." If this be the bargain, it is no bargain.

10. Many that are loth to leave Christ, yet do leave him. After a long struggle between their convictions and their corruptions, their corruptions carry the day at last; they are very sorry that they cannot serve God and mammon both; but, if one must be quitted, it shall be their God, not their worldly gain.

II. Christ's discourse with his disciples upon this occasion, in which we may observe,

1. Riches are a great hindrance to many in the way to heaven. Christ took notice of the reluctancy and regret with which the rich man broke off from him. He *saw that he was very sorrowful*, and was sorry for him; but thence he infers, *How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!* v. 24. If this ruler had had but as little of the world as Peter, and

James, and John had, in all probability he would have left it, to follow Christ, as they did; but, having a great estate, it had a great influence upon him, and he chose rather to take his leave of Christ than to lay himself under an obligation to dispose of his estate in charitable uses. Christ asserts the difficulty of the salvation of rich people very emphatically: *It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*, v. 25. It is a proverbial expression, that denotes the thing to be extremely difficult.

2. There is in the hearts of all people such a general affection to this world, and the things of it, that, since Christ has required it as necessary to salvation that we should sit loose to this world, it is really very hard for any to get to heaven. If we must *sell all*, or break with Christ, *who then can be saved?* v. 26. They do not find fault with what Christ required as hard and unreasonable. No, it is very fit that they who expect an eternal happiness in the other world should be willing to forego all that is dear to them in this world, in expectation of it. But they know how closely the hearts of most men cleave to this world, and are ready to despair of their being ever brought to this.

3. There are such difficulties in the way of our salvation: as could never be got over but by pure omnipotence, by that grace of God which is almighty, and to which that is *possible* which exceeds all created power and wisdom. The *things which are impossible with men* (and utterly impossible it is that men should work such a change upon their own spirits as to turn them from the world to God, it is like *dividing the sea*, and *driving Jordan back*), these things are *possible with God*. His grace can work upon the soul, so as to alter the bent and bias of it, and give it a contrary ply; and it is he that *works in us both to will and to do*.

4. There is an aptness in us to speak too much of what we have left and lost, of what we have done and suffered, for Christ. This appears in Peter: *Lo, we have left all, and followed thee*, v. 28. When it came in his way, he could not forbear magnifying his own and his brethren's affection to Christ, in *quitting* all to follow him. But this we should be so far from boasting of, that we should rather acknowledge it not worth taking notice of, and be ashamed of ourselves that there should have been any regret and difficulty in the doing of it, and any hankerings towards those things afterwards.

5. Whatever we have left, or laid out, for Christ, it shall without fail be abundantly made up to us in this world and that to come, notwithstanding our weaknesses and infirmities (v. 29, 30): *No man has left the comfort of his estate or relations for the kingdom of God's sake*, rather than they should hinder either his services to that kingdom or his enjoyments of it, *who shall not receive manifold more in this present time*, in the graces and comforts of God's Spirit, in the pleasures of communion with God and of a good conscience, advantages which, to those that know how to value and improve them, will abundantly countervail all their loses. Yet that is not all; in the world to come they *shall receive life everlasting*, which is the thing that the ruler seemed to have his eye and heart upon.

✠ LUKE 18:31-34

CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS FORETOLD

Here is,

I. The notice Christ gave to his disciples of his sufferings and death approaching, and of the glorious issue of them, which he himself had a perfect sight and foreknowledge of, and thought it necessary to give them warning of, that it might be the less surprise and terror to them. Two things here are which we had not in the other evangelists: —

1. The *sufferings* of Christ are here spoken of as the *fulfilling of the scriptures*, with which consideration Christ reconciled himself to them, and would reconcile them: *All things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man*, especially the hardships he should undergo, *shall be accomplished*. Note, The Spirit of Christ, in the Old-Testament prophets, *testified beforehand his sufferings*, and *the glory that should follow*, ✠ 1 Peter 1:11. This proves that the scriptures are the *word of God*, for they had their exact and full accomplishment; and that Jesus Christ was *sent of God*, for they had their accomplishment *in him*; this was *he that should come*, for whatever was *foretold* concerning the Messiah was verified in him; and he would submit to any thing for the fulfilling of scripture, that not one jot or tittle of that should fall to the ground. This makes the *offence of the cross to cease*, and puts an honour upon it. *Thus it was written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer*, thus it became him.

2. The ignominy and disgrace done to Christ in his sufferings are here most insisted upon. The other evangelists had said that he should be *mocked*; but here it is added, *He shall be spitefully treated, hybristhesetai* — *he shall be loaded with contumely and contempt*, shall have all possible reproach put upon him. This was that part of his sufferings by which in a spiritual manner he satisfied God's justice for the injury we had done him in his honour by sin. Here is one particular instance of disgrace done him, that *he was spit upon*, which had been particularly foretold, ²⁸⁰⁶Isaiah 50:6. But here, as always, when Christ spoke of his sufferings and death, he foretold his resurrection as that which took off both the terror and reproach of his sufferings: *The third day he shall rise again.*

II. The confusion that the disciples were hereby put into. This was so contrary to the notions they had had of the Messiah and his kingdom, such a balk to their expectations from their Master, and such a breaking of all their measures, that *they understood none of these things*, v. 34. Their prejudices were so strong that they *would not* understand them literally, and they *could not* understand them otherwise, so that they did not understand them at all. It was a mystery, it was a riddle to them, it must be so; but they think it impossible to be reconciled with the glory and honour of the Messiah, and the design of setting up his kingdom. This saying was *hidden from them, kekrymmenon ap' auton*, it was apocrypha to them, they could not receive it: for their parts, they had read the Old Testament many a time, but they could never see any thing in it that would be *accomplished* in the disgrace and death of this Messiah. They were so intent upon those prophecies that spoke of his glory that they overlooked those that spoke of his *sufferings*, which the scribes and doctors of the law should have directed them to take notice of, and should have brought into their creeds and catechisms, as well as the other; but they did not suit their scheme, and therefore were laid aside. Note, *Therefore* it is that people run into mistakes, because they *read their Bibles by the halves*, and are as partial in the prophets as they are *in the law*. They are only for the *smooth things*, ²⁸¹⁰Isaiah 30:10. Thus now we are too apt, in reading the prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled, to have our expectations raised of the glorious state of the church in the latter days. But we overlook its wilderness sackcloth state, and are willing to fancy that is over, and nothing is reserved for us but the halcyon days; and then, when tribulation and persecution arise, we do not *understand* it, neither *know we the things that are done*, though we

are told as plainly as can be that *through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.*

LUKE 18:35-43

SIGHT RESTORED TO THE BLIND

Christ came not only to bring *light* to a *dark* world, and so to set before us the *objects* we are to have in view, but also to give *sight* to blind *souls*, and by healing the *organ* to enable them to view those objects. As a token of this, he cured many of their bodily blindness: we have now an account of one to whom he *gave sight* near Jericho. Mark gives us an account of one, and names him, whom he cured *as he went out of Jericho*, ^{Mark 10:46} Mark 10:46. Matthew speaks of two whom he cured *as they departed* from Jericho, ^{Matthew 20:30} Matthew 20:30. Luke says it was *en to engizein auton* — *when he was near* to Jericho, which might be when he was going out of it as well as when he was coming into it. Observe,

I. This poor blind man *sat by the wayside, begging*, v. 35. It seems, he was not only *blind*, but *poor*, had nothing to subsist on, nor any relations to maintain him; the fitter emblem of the world of mankind which Christ came to heal and save; they are therefore *wretched* and *miserable*, for they are both *poor and blind*, ^{Revelation 3:17} Revelation 3:17. He sat begging, for he was blind, and could not work for his living. Note, Those ought to be relieved by charity whom the providence of God has any way disabled to get their own bread. Such objects of charity *by the way-side* ought not to be overlooked by us. Christ here cast a favourable eye upon a *common beggar*, and, though there are cheats among such, yet they must not therefore be all thought such.

II. Hearing the noise of a multitude passing by, he asked *what it meant*, v. 36. This we had not before. It teaches us that it is good to be *inquisitive*, and that those who are so some time or other find the benefit of it. Those who want their *sight* should make so much the better use of their *hearing*, and, when they cannot see with their own eyes, should, by *asking questions*, make use of other people's eyes. So this blind man did, and by that means came to understand that Jesus of Nazareth *passed by*, v. 37. It

is good being in Christ's way; and, when we have an opportunity of applying ourselves to him, not to let it slip.

III. His prayer has in it a great deal both of faith and fervency: *Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me*, v. 38. He owns Christ to be the *Son of David*, the Messiah promised; he believes him to be Jesus, a Saviour; he believes he is able to help and succour him, and earnestly begs his favour: "*Have mercy on me, pardon my sin, pity my misery.*" Christ is a merciful king; those that apply themselves to him as the *Son of David* shall find him so, and ask enough for themselves when they pray, *Have mercy on us*; for Christ's mercy includes all.

IV. Those who are in good earnest for Christ's favours and blessings will not be put by from the pursuit of them, though they meet with opposition and rebuke. They who went along chid him as troublesome to the Master, noisy and impertinent, and bade him *hold his peace*; but he went on with his petition, nay, the check given him was but as a dam to a full stream, which makes it swell so much the more; he *cried the louder, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me*. Those who would speed in prayer must be importunate in prayer. This history, in the close of the chapter, intimates the same thing with the parable in the beginning of the chapter, that *men ought always to pray, and not to faint*.

V. Christ encourages poor beggars, whom men frown upon, and invites them to come to him, and is ready to entertain them, and bid them welcome: *He commanded him to be brought to him*. Note, Christ has more tenderness and compassion for distressed supplicants than any of his followers have. Though Christ was upon his journey, yet he stopped and *stood*, and *commanded him to be brought to him*. Those who had checked him must now lend him their hands to lead him to Christ.

VI. Though Christ knows all our wants, he will know them from us (v. 41): *What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?* By spreading our case before God, with a particular representation of our wants and burdens, we teach ourselves to value the mercy we are in pursuit of; and it is necessary that we should, else we are not fit to receive it. This man poured out his soul before Christ, when he said, *Lord, that I may receive my sight*. Thus particular should we be in prayer, upon particular occasions.

VII. The prayer of faith, guided by Christ's encouraging promises, and grounded on them, shall not be in vain; nay, it shall not only receive an *answer of peace*, but of *honour* (v. 42); Christ said, *Receive thy sight, thy faith hath saved thee*. True faith will produce fervency in prayer, and both together will fetch in abundance of the fruits of Christ's favour; and they are then doubly comfortable when they come in that way, when we are *saved by faith*.

VIII. The *grace of Christ* ought to be thankfully acknowledged, to the *glory of God*, v. 43.

1. The poor beggar himself, that had his sight restored, *followed Christ, glorifying God*. Christ made it his business to glorify his Father; and those whom he healed *pleased him* best when they *praised God*, as those shall *please God* best who *praise Christ* and do him honour; for, in *confessing that he is Lord*, we *give glory to God the Father*. It is for the *glory of God* if we *follow Christ*, as those will do whose *eyes are opened*.

2. The *people that saw it* could not forbear *giving praise to God*, who had given such power to the *Son of Man*, and by him had conferred such favours on the *sons of men*. Note, We must give praise to God for his mercies to others as well as for mercies to ourselves.