

Proper 19

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Prayer of the Day

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity. Grant us the fullness of your grace, that, pursuing what you have promised, we may share your heavenly glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Exodus 32:7-14

{7} The LORD said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; {8} they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" {9} The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. {10} Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation." {11} But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? {12} Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. {13} Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" {14} And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

6-7: While Moses is on the mountain receiving instruction from Yahweh, Aaron and the people are trying to work out their own destiny. This is a major motif in the story of the people of God. Adam and Eve sought to be like God, Abraham sought an heir; here the people are uneasy about Moses' absence and seek a surrogate. Moses is told by Yahweh to go down because the people "have acted perversely."

8. *'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'*: The same expression is used in 1 Kings 12:25ff in the story about Jeroboam's calves in Dan and Bethel. The expression may have been introduced at a later time to incriminate Jeroboam in the idolatry in the wilderness. What Judah saw idolatry, Israel saw as an alternative to the Ark of the Covenant; both were viewed as footstools or thrones for the invisible Yahweh. Some point to the word "your" as an effort to exclude Aaron from the charge of idolatry.

9-14: Yahweh is determined to destroy the people, but Moses intercedes on their behalf and Yahweh changes his mind. This is similar to but also different from Abraham's intercession on behalf of the Sodomites. There the question was whether the wicked and righteous would both be destroyed. Here Moses pleads for the lives of the unrighteous because they are descendants of Abraham. In 32:19ff Moses exacts a punishment on the people and Yahweh sends a plague on them.

10. *of you I will make a great nation*: Yahweh's promise to Moses is the same as his promise to Abraham. In verse 13 Moses reminds Yahweh of the substance of that promise, and particularly of its unconditional character ("they shall inherit it forever").

Psalms 51:1-10

{1} Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. {2} Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. {3} For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. {4} Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. {5} Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. {6} You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. {7} Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. {8} Let me hear joy and

gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. {9} Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. {10} Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

"Of the seven penitential psalms Psalm 51 is the most important one. It demonstrates the essence of true penitence. Here with inflexible earnestness the uttermost depth of sin is grasped and the way is shown that lead to forgiveness and true communion with God." [1] As a response to the first lesson the Psalm points to the way of redemption for the sin of the people, though they apparently do not see it, and suffer punishment in spite of Yahweh's willingness to change his mind.

10. a clean heart...a new and right spirit: The petitioner does not pray only for forgiveness, but for a newly created human nature, for a renewal of the pre-fall condition of righteousness.

1 Timothy 1:12-17

{12} I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, {13} even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, {14} and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. {15} The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. {16} But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. {17} To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

13. I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence: Paul confesses the sins of his life before it was transformed by the intervention of Christ.

I had acted ignorantly in unbelief: "Although he was a defender of the Law, in a word, he was not *dikaios*: he was ignorant of the way faith was to express itself in *agape*, and his internal disposition of *apistia* (disbelief drove him to rage and murder. The *nomos* could identify such characteristics in him, but it could do nothing to change them. Such a profound change required a gift (*charis*) from God, through Jesus Christ, a gift of empowerment to change (1:12). The mercy shown to Paul by Jesus was an overwhelming gift that transformed him by giving him the same qualities of *pistis* and *agape* that are 'in Christ Jesus' (1:14) and are the goal of the commandment that Paul now advocates." [2]

15. The saying is sure: This is used also in 1 Timothy 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11 and Titus 3:8 as a formula introducing an important element of the Christian tradition.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners: This is the tradition Paul is quoting.

—of whom I am the foremost: As the foremost of sinners Paul uses himself as an example of the patience of Christ to those who would believe in him. See 1 Corinthians 15:9 where Paul wrote, "I am the least of the apostles....," and Ephesians 3:8, "I am the very least of all the saints...."

16. making me an example to those who would come to believe in him: "His conversion seems to have no other purpose than to serve as a 'prototype'.... As "the first" Paul is the typical representative of those who have received the mercy which the sinner can experience." [3]

17. King of the ages: Jeremiah 10:10, *malak ha'olam*, "king of the world (age)"

the only God: An echo of the *shema*, "The Lord our God, one" or "alone."

invisible: Colossians 1:15: Jesus is the image of the "invisible God."

Luke 15:1-10

{1} Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. {2} And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." {3} So he told them this parable: {4} "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? {5} When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. {6} And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have

found my sheep that was lost.' {7} Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. {8} "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? {9} When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' {10} Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The point of the double parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin is that "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons." The parables were told to illustrate why Jesus welcomed the tax collectors and sinners, and to justify his hospitality to the Pharisees. He does so because God does so. This is a direct challenge to the Pharisees for whom personal righteousness was a high value pursued at the expense of other expressions of obedience to God's will.

4. *go after the one that is lost*: Yahweh condemns the "shepherds of Israel" because they have not sought the lost or brought back the strayed" (Ezekiel 34:4-6).

5. *When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices*: "The point is not the change of mind in the sinner, but the unchanging love of God that will not let him go, which is being manifested in the redemptive activity of Jesus." [4]

7. *there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner*: This may be easy to hear, but it is not easy to accept. Each one (each sinner) is more valuable than all (all righteous people) together, or if that can not be managed (though it is implied in the "more joy" statement), then each one is *as* valuable as all together.

8. *ten silver coins*: The coins were called *zuz* and each one would buy twelve loaves of bread, an amphora of oil, and a very fine meal.

Reflection

The first lesson shows how deeply felt the prohibition of idols (Exodus 20:4-5; Deuteronomy 5:8-9) or images (Deuteronomy 4:15-17) was in Israel. It also provides an explanation for the hostility between Judah and Israel in the period of the monarchy. In the reading Yahweh changes his mind about destroying Israel. "...by itself, it makes the God of Israel as arbitrary as Zeus. If it is read in its full context, it epitomizes the essential paradox of the Hebrew faith: God is 'merciful and gracious...but will not clear the guilty' (34.7)." [5]

To this paradox the answer of the readings is "repentance." To know, acknowledge and confess one's sin, and to plead for God's mercy, not on the basis of one's own merit, but through the blood of Christ is to know and receive the grace of God.

Paul is grateful to God for his mercy, and declares that Christ uses him as an example of the mercy God will grant to those who believe and repent.

Sin that is not known is unintentional, but it can be forgiven only when it is acknowledged and confessed. We should ask ourselves who we identify ourselves with in this reading. The lost sheep and the lost coin are really not options for us, so we have only the tax collectors and sinners, or the Pharisees. Human righteousness is not valued by God as highly as the repentance. And God declares his almighty power "almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity."

Often we cherish God's grace and mercy that is expressed in his love for us and his forgiveness of our sins, as though he does that for our sake. Paul knew, what we should also know, God forgives us, not for our sake, but for Christ's sake and as an example to others that they, too, may confess their sins and be forgiven.

Hymns [6]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

424--E--Lord of Glory,
291--D--Jesus Sinners Will
526--II--Immortal, Invisible, God
243--G--Lord, with Glowing

529--G--Praise God. Praise
765s--G--Bread of the
448, 306, 380, 297

Prayers of the People [7]

P or A: Gathered together by the grace of God, we offer our petitions in Jesus' name, and respond together, "Amen."

A: For the restoration of the earth's environment, that the human family may work to repair what wasteful and polluting actions have rendered desolate. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: For the poor, that the Lord would be their refuge, and that you, O God, would work through us to assist them by providing food, shelter, and community. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: For the sick and the dying, that their suffering may cease. Comfort and heal, we pray _____, and those whom we name in our hearts... . In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: For pardon for the sins of this church community, as we have not always inclined our hearts towards you, and have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

A: For your help, O Lord, in forgiving those who sin against us--that we might accept apologies from those who have wronged us, just as we are forgiven with abounding grace upon the repentance of sins. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

P: We lift up our prayers to you trusting in your grace and mercy. We pray together in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Or [8]

Presider or deacon

Let us beg mercy of our God who welcomes sinners and eats with them.

Deacon or other leader

For this holy gathering, and for the people of God in every place.

For mercy, peace, and justice among all peoples.

For abundant fruits of the earth, and for safety from violent storms.

For the sick and the suffering, travelers by land, by water, and by air, prisoners, captives, and their families, and all those in desperate need.

For our city and those who live in it, and for our families, companions, and all those we love.

For those who rest in Christ and for all the dead.

Lifting our voices with all creation, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

God of the stars of heaven, hear the prayers we offer this day and gather your lost sheep into the bounty of your realm, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notes

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[1] Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962, p. 401.

[2] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 2001, p. 183.

[3] Martin Dibelius, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972, p. 30.

- [4] F. W. Beare, *The Earliest Records of Jesus*. Nashville, 1962, 178.
- [5] Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974, p. 568.
- [6] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclc0001.txt>
- [7] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt
- [8] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>