

Shorthand Sermon on Luke 18:9–14¹

This is the last of six sermons by Charles Wesley that survive only in copies composed in the shorthand that he had learned from John Byrom. CW appears to have preached directly from the shorthand manuscript. These sermons were inaccessible, even to most scholars, until an expansion of the shorthand was published by Thomas R. Albin and Oliver A. Beckerlegge in 1987.²

John Byrom’s shorthand is constructed of consonant sounds, with vowel markers; though the latter are often omitted when assumed to be obvious. It also frequently uses single letters for entire words, abbreviations for phrases, and the like. As such, expansion of shorthand texts necessarily involves varying degrees of interpretation and hypothetical renderings.³ Since the entire sermon that follows is in shorthand, we do *not* enclose each line or paragraph in double square brackets “[[]],” as we do for brief shorthand additions to longhand texts. But when more than one expansion might make sense, the letters indicated by the shorthand are given, enclosing the remainder of our suggested expansion in single brackets “[].” When the expansion is more tentative, a question mark is included within the brackets “[?]”.

The earliest surviving record of CW preaching a sermon on “the Pharisee and Publican” was August 14, 1743 at West Street Chapel in London. The shorthand manuscript that he likely used for this occasion survives at the Methodist Archive and Research Centre (MA 1977/597/6)—though there is no log given on the manuscript of when it was preached. A later (shorthand) “clean copy” of the manuscript also survives at the Methodist Archive and Research Centre (MA 1977/597/11). This copy is incomplete, but makes a few changes and spells out (in shorthand) more completely some words and phrases which appear in abbreviated form in the initial copy.

The transcription which follows is our expansion of the shorthand of the earliest copy, since that reflects the text as CW preached it at the time. We focus on CW’s final text—ignoring any text ~~struck out~~ and replaced by CW. Revisions made in the later transcription are mentioned in footnotes. Our expansion differs on a few occasions from that of Albin & Beckerlegge. Once again we indicate the page transitions (in **red** font) of the earliest manuscript.

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²Thomas R. Albin and Oliver A. Beckerlegge (eds.). *Charles Wesley’s Earliest Evangelical Sermons: Six Shorthand Manuscript Sermons Now for the First Time Transcribed from the Original* (Ilford: Wesley Historical Society, 1987), 87–93.

³See Timothy Underhill, “John Byrom’s Shorthand: An Introduction,” *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 104 (2008): 61–91.

Luke 18:9ff.

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others. Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful unto me a sinner. I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

[1.] In this parable, as in a glass, may every person here present see himself. For there is no one of us who is not either a Pharisee or a publican. Indeed by nature every man is a Pharisee, being utterly blind to sin, though he is born in it;¹ being utterly senseless of his disease, though his whole head is sick and his whole heart faint, though from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in him, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores, which have not been closed, neither bound up, nor mollified with ointment.² He is no other than an eternal spirit in his passage to that God from whom he is fallen. Fallen he is indeed! For he knows it not, but boasts of light, life, health, and liberty in the midst of darkness and disease and chains and death.³

[2.] This is the highest aggravation of his misery, the worst circumstance of his fall, that he is so dreadfully insensible of it. Many deny it in express terms, and so in effect does every one who does not feel himself a lost sinner. If he has not yet found himself out to be a publican, he continues a Pharisee, and trusts in himself that he is righteous. And so he must do, till that blessed Spirit, whose only property it is to convince of sin,⁴ shine into his soul, and search out his spirit, and show him what is in his heart.

[3.] God offers to all this divine instructor. The light shineth in darkness, though the darkness comprehendeth it not.⁵ Yet have we a power to comprehend it—not indeed of our own, for it is the gift of God in Christ Jesus,⁶ whose death restored us to a capacity of salvation. Him hath [p. 2] God exalted to be a prince and a saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins.⁷

¹See Ps. 51:5. The later copy reads “is altogether born.”

²See Isa. 1:6. The later copy corrects “nor mollified,” to “neither mollified”; because a series of three.

³Orig., has “of liberty” rather than “and liberty”; a mistake corrected in the later copy.

⁴See John 16:8. The later copy elides “only,” as the Spirit has other properties.

⁵See John 1:5.

⁶The later copy inverts to read “Jesus Christ.”

⁷See Acts 5:31.

[4.] Repentance in its lowest signification implies a sensible conviction or feeling of sin. It is this distinguishes the publican from the Pharisee. It is this humble consciousness of our own inherent misery, this poverty and mournfulness of spirit, which disposes us to believe and embrace the gospel. We cannot be saved, unless we believe.⁸ We cannot believe, unless we repent. We cannot repent unless we see ourselves lost. Wherefore, my brethren, let me ardently conjure you to examine yourselves by this history and see whether you are not at this time righteous and not sinners,⁹ Pharisees and not publicans.

[5.] *And he spake this parable to certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.*¹⁰ – This is the sure effect and infallible mark of a man’s trusting in himself that he is righteous: his despising others. Whosoever despises another, thinks himself better than that other. But whosoever thinks himself better in himself than the vilest sinner upon earth, is an open notorious convicted Pharisee.

[6.] *Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a publican.* – Whence we may observe that going to church is no certain sign of a Christian; and yet that in so doing a man puts himself in God’s way. The publican came a sinner, and went back justified. Nor is it impossible but the Pharisee may come a self-justifier and return a publican.

[7.] The name and profession of a publican was most odious among the Jews. They looked upon him as no better than a heathen. “Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican” (Matt.18:17). They abhorred him as we do the meanest and most profligate thieves, the most scandalous, abominable, and notorious sinner.

[8.] Of the Pharisee I need say nothing, but leave him to do what he much delights [p. 3] in to give you his own character. *The Pharisee stood, and prayed thus with himself.* – For a man may make prayers, yea and long prayers too, and yet be a Pharisee. He is no Christian who is not constant in the means of grace, and yet a man may use them constantly without being a Christian. Though saying our prayers be one particular duty of religion, religion does not stand in purely saying our prayers.

[9.] But the Pharisee goes further than this. *He stood and prayed thus with himself, and said, God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.* – He loves to pray standing on the corners of the streets that he may be seen of men.¹¹ But here he prays with himself to God, and we must not therefore question his sincerity. Observe hence that a man may believe himself sincere, and yet be a Pharisee. Nay, he may even ascribe his righteousness to God, acknowledge it to be his working in him, give him the glory and say, “God, I thank thee.”¹²

[10.] *I thank thee that I am not as other men are* – A Pharisee’s righteousness stands in negatives. And he that trusts to his having done no harm, to his not being the worst of people, to his having never wronged any man,¹³ is a most notorious Pharisee. Whatever our good sort of

⁸The later copy changes “unless” to “except” in this instance.

⁹The later copy changes “see whether” to “see if.”

¹⁰Here and in subsequent instances CW placed brackets around quoted portions of his text, then expounded on them. We have chosen to show this with italics and a following dash.

¹¹See Matt. 6:5.

¹²The later copy reads “give him the glory in words.”

¹³The later copy reads “to his being not one of the worst of people, to his not having”

people may imagine, righteousness does not altogether consist in going to church and paying every man his own. Yet how many content themselves with no higher a righteousness than this.¹⁴ “I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers. I am not guilty of any notorious vice. I am no cheat, no rake, no prostitute. I never committed murder or adultery. I have kept the commandments outwardly. I never did any harm in my life.”

[11.] But can the Pharisee say with truth “*I am not as other men are*”? – Is he really better than they?¹⁵ No, in no wise. His plea is not only insufficient but false. He is such as other men are. All are under sin.¹⁶ As it is written, “There is none righteous, no not one. [...] [p. 4] There is no difference. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”¹⁷ The Pharisee’s sins may be more refined than the publican’s. This man’s filthiness may be of the spirit and that man’s of the flesh,¹⁸ but both have the same original corruption, though it shows itself differently. The fashionable sinner is as truly a sinner as the scandalous one. She that liveth in pleasures is as really dead to God as she that liveth in adultery.¹⁹ He that harbours anger or ill will against his brother is as certainly a murderer as he that sheddeth men’s blood.²⁰

[12.] Wherefore no man can say, “I am not as this publican.” Or if he does, he is worse than this publican; for he is a Pharisee and does not so much as know it. He is a Pharisee who thinks himself better than another—nay, than the vilest sinner upon earth. He that says, “Stand by thyself, come not near to me, I am holier than thou” (Isaiah 65:5) is of all men the most unholy, for he is stained with spiritual pride, which is of all sins the foulest and most abominable.

[13.] But let us hear what his type and predecessor has further to say for himself.²¹ *I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I possess.* – And in so doing he did well. These things ought he to have done, and not to have left undone those weightier matters of the law: judgment, mercy, and faith. But this is as far as a Pharisee can go: to abstain from open vice, to use outward means, and do outward duties. A course of services, a model of external performances, this is his highest profession and hereby he justifies himself before men.

[14.] Turn we now our eyes to his despised companion. *And the publican standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!* – See here a pattern of true repentance! *The publican standing afar off.* – Being thoroughly oppressed with a sense of sin, and justly conscious of his own unworthiness, he durst not presume to approach the [p. 5] divine majesty he had so highly offended. He saw the

¹⁴CW originally wrote “no better a righteousness,” then changed it to “no higher” in the first copy. The later copy returned to the word “better.”

¹⁵The later copy reads “better by nature than they.”

¹⁶See Gal. 3:22. The later copy reads “are concluded under sin.”

¹⁷Rom. 3:10, 22–23.

¹⁸See 2 Cor. 7:1. CW interchanged “flesh” and “spirit” initially in the original, but used numbers to reverse their placement; this alteration is observed in the later copy.

¹⁹Orig. reads “and she that”; corrected in the later copy.

²⁰See Matt. 5:21–22.

²¹The later copy elides “type and.”

immeasurable distance between God and sinners, and humbled himself in the dust before him.²² *He would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven* – as knowing that no unclean thing could stand in his sight who was of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. But *he smote upon his breast* – he felt the hell of his own nature, was painfully sensible that in him dwelt no good thing, but that he was a motley mixture of beast and devil.²³ His gesture showed him a condemned criminal, that he had the sentence of death in himself, and did from his heart believe he deserved to be damned.

[15.] But what has he to say in arrest of judgment?²⁴ *God be merciful unto me a sinner!* – His mouth is stopped, or he only opens it to confess himself guilty, and his damnation just.²⁵ He has no merit, no works, no righteousness to plead. All he says is *God be merciful unto me a sinner!* There is nothing in the case but sin and mercy. He finds nothing in himself but matter for condemnation, and therefore he goes out of himself to seek salvation in the unknown depths of the divine goodness.²⁶ If he is a sinner, God (he knows) is merciful. If he is misery, God is love. Here his hopes begin. And he casts himself before the throne of grace and says in his heart with Esther, “If I perish, I perish.”²⁷

[16.] This parable, as most of the others, is a real history. Nor can we doubt there having been such a poor publican, the type of every convicted sinner, who thus condemning himself was justified by God. His only plea was *God be merciful* (or as it is in the original, God be propitious or reconciled) *to me a sinner*. – As he spoke these words he received the atonement. He looked up to him whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.²⁸ He believed in him that justifies the ungodly,²⁹ as the friend of sinners himself testifies, *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other*. – Justified, that is forgiven and counted righteous. It is literally thus. This man went down to his house justified [p. 6] and not the other. The reason whereof is very observable. *For everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*. – That is, everyone that sees himself lost shall be found in Christ, everyone who will not see himself lost shall be lost eternally. Whosoever condemns himself, shall be justified by God. Whosoever justifies himself shall be condemned by God. He that thinketh the better of himself for anything God has done by him or in him, and prefers himself to the vilest sinner, he shall be abased, shall lose the reward of all his good deeds, be counted worse than the worst sinner he despises, and see the publicans and heathen enter into the kingdom of God before him.³⁰ While the most filthy sinner that can feel himself such and

²²The later copy changes “humbled himself in” to “sank as unto.”

²³See William Law, *A Demonstration of the Gross and Fundamental Errors of a late Book* (London: W. Innys & R. Mansby, 1737), 240.

²⁴I.e., to stop a judgment from being legally rendered.

²⁵Orig., “and he only”; corrected to “or he only” in the later copy.

²⁶The remainder of the later copy, beginning with the last two words in this sentence, is missing.

²⁷Esther 4:16.

²⁸See Rom. 3:25.

²⁹See Rom. 4:5.

³⁰See Matt. 18:17.

despair of himself and confess that all his desert is hell, the most abandoned wretch that can humble himself under the mighty hand of God, and fly to the Father of spirits for refuge, he shall be exalted in due time.³¹ Being brought down to the gates of hell, God shall bring him up again, shall justify him freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus;³² shall say unto his soul, “Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee. Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole.”³³

[17.] The greatest sinner, who knows himself to be so, is in a fairer way than the holiest Pharisee, who trusts in himself that he is righteous. This latter is the Pharisee here described, whose pharisaism consisted in his not knowing himself to be a sinner. His deeds were praiseworthy in themselves and he did right in thinking good of them. Wherein then did he offend? Why, he went up to the temple to pray, and his prayer has nothing of petition in it. It is only an encomium upon himself. He asks for nothing. He wants nothing. He does not sue for mercy. No! That is only for publicans to do. “God be merciful to me a sinner,” is a fit prayer for them. As for him, he is none of your sinners. He is righteous. He is well, and has no need of a physician! [p. 7]

[18.] Suppose a preacher, to convince him of sin, was to ask him this plain question, Do you from your heart believe you deserve to be damned? How would he take it, think you? Could you easily persuade him to believe he did deserve it? What! he deserved to be damned? He that had so long distinguished himself from the horde of vicious wretches? He that was so constantly at prayer? He that had done so much good? Put him upon a level with publicans? Rather than confess this, would he not be cut to the heart and gnash upon you with his teeth?³⁴ I fear he would be tempted to go out of church, to turn his back upon the minister and house of God, and vow he would never come there again. But what would you infer from such a behaviour? That the unhappy man was yet in his sins, in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity;³⁵ that the god of this world had blinded his eyes, and still kept possession of him;³⁶ that he was, my brethren, the picture of us.

[19.] He that is a Pharisee let him declare it by departing now. Depart ye unregenerate ones. Depart ye Pharisees! But remember the day will overtake you when you cannot flee from God, but must stay and hear this terrible word, “Depart, depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”³⁷

[20.] Suppose we asked the poor publican the same question. Would he be offended at it? Oh no! But he would smite upon his breast once more and say, God be merciful to me a sinner! I do, I do indeed deserve to be damned! I deserve a thousand hells. But Christ has taken my deserts and given me his. He was made sin for me, who knew no sin, that I might be made the

³¹See 1 Pet. 5:6; Heb. 12:9.

³²Rom. 3:24.

³³Matt. 9:2; then Luke 17:19.

³⁴See Acts 7:54.

³⁵See Acts 8:23.

³⁶See 2 Cor. 4:4.

³⁷Matt. 25:41.

righteousness of God in him.³⁸ He came to seek and to save that which was lost.³⁹ He is the physician of them that be sick,⁴⁰ the friend, saviour and advocate of sinners.⁴¹ He suffered for the unjust;⁴² I am unjust. He died for sinners;⁴³ I am [p. 8] a sinner! He justifies the ungodly;⁴⁴ I am ungodly! Here is the stay and anchor of my soul.⁴⁵ This is my confidence. This shall be my plea forever. I do deserve to be damned, but Christ hath died. The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me!⁴⁶ This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners: of whom I am chief.⁴⁷ The Son of God was lifted up that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.⁴⁸ Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief!⁴⁹

Source: Methodist Archive and Research Centre, MA 1977/597/6 (compared with MA 1977/597/11).

³⁸See 2 Cor. 5:21.

³⁹See Luke 19:10.

⁴⁰See Matt. 9:12.

⁴¹See Matt. 9:11, 11:19; John 8:1–11.

⁴²See 1 Pet. 3:18.

⁴³See 1 Cor. 15:3.

⁴⁴See Rom. 4:5.

⁴⁵See Heb. 6:19.

⁴⁶See Gal. 2:20.

⁴⁷See 1 Tim. 1:15.

⁴⁸See John 3:16.

⁴⁹See Mark 9:24.