

great to fear men, and too foolish to fear God.

A widow, poor and friendless. God promises specially to care for the widow, Ps. cxlvi. 9. Man should do so, Isa. i. 17; James i. 27. Her prayers made the judge "thine within himself," while she thought they were totally useless. It was pure selfishness that made the judge do anything.

Fear what he saith. He only thought it, but God hears thoughts, and notes them down.

Shall not God? If one so wicked, so unjust, so selfish, could be moved by importunate prayer to help one whom he neither feared nor loved; how much more shall God, so good and so holy, answer the prayers of his own children, when they are in so much greater need of His help.

II. How to Pray, ver. 9-14.

Christ seems to have seen some Pharisees, who, hearing the lesson, "pray always," were filled with pride at the thought of "how often and regularly they prayed." Christ wished to show them that the prayer of pride was useless.

The temple. It stood on a hill. The time of the morning and evening sacrifice, 9 A.M., 3 P.M., was usually devoted to prayer, Luke i. 10.

The Pharisee. The Pharisees pretended to be, and thought themselves to be, very good; but few of them were so, Matt. xxiii. 27, 28. Men thought them good, respectable, religious people. Paul was one, Matt. xxiii. 4, 7, 10, 14, 15.

His prayer—*He stood apart*, near the inner court, and spoke loud; he sought nothing, he only repeated a list of his own good deeds and other people's sins. *I thank thee*. Yet he was not truly grateful, for he was proud. His pride made all he did offensive to God. He compared himself with others, not with God's law, 2 Cor. x. 12.

The Publican. A tax-gatherer for the Romans. The publicans were generally very bad people. Matthew and Zaccheus were publicans, Luke iii. 12. *He stood afar off*. Perhaps in the outer court. Shame made him hang down his head, Ezra ix. 6. He thought himself a great sinner—worse than any one else; yet he cast himself on God's mercy. How humble, how earnest, how short his prayer!

He went home forgiven. The Pharisee—like Haman, Esther v. 10-12—went home full of pride, but with a sentence of death waiting for him.

APPLICATION.

This passage may well be divided, at the end of verse 8, into two lessons—

1. *Pray always*. This means, look to God continually for all you require. We can desire a thing from God, though we are not speaking about it; that is prayer, 1 Thes. v. 17. How much we need this lesson.

Are there any one here who used to pray, but does not now? God will answer. Pray to Him, as Jacob did. We can pray anywhere—on a sick-bed, Ps. xxx. 2; on a death-bed, 2 Chron. xiv. 11, xviii. 31. Jonah in whale's belly; Daniel in the lion's den.

2. *God will answer prayer when He pleases*. He promises to answer, but does not fix the time. Though we may think so, He will never be too late. When Lazarus died, John xi. 21. So when they prayed for Peter, Acts xii., Elijah, 1 Kings xviii. 41.

3. *God's people cry unto Him day and night*. Do we? If we are prayerless, we are not His, Ps. cxvii. 2; Job xxvii. 10; Isa. xliii. 26.

4. *Take your complaint to God rather than man*. It is a good thing if affliction send us to Christ, James v. 13. He is ever ready to hear and able to answer. Men often will not listen, or cannot help us, 1 Kings vi. 27. The woman with the issue, Luke viii. 43.

5. *The proud trust themselves, and perish*. Whatever they may say, they trust themselves. You may be all the Pharisee was—respectable, honest, admired as religious, and despising others—yet God may abhor your proud heart, Prov. xvi. 5. You may be like the devil, and perish with him, 1 Tim. iii. 6.

6. *The humble trust God and are saved*. The publican presented nothing but his sin, Ps. xxxviii. 4; xl. 12. Thought others better than himself. Trusted only to God's mercy, and was safe. Are you willing to take his place and his prayer? Then here is mercy for you. The dying thief, Luke xxiii. 42.

7. *How hopeless the case of those worse than the Pharisee*. "Who are even as these men"—who are proud—who never pretend to be religious—to pray, to give alms, to who are unjust. The Pharisee was not pardoned, Matt. v. 20.

8. *God will not receive thanks from a proud sinner*. The Pharisees were rejected, so was Cain's offering of flowers, Gen. iv. 7. You must first seek pardon through Christ, Abel did so, Gen. iv. 3.; Heb. ix. 22.

9. *Beware of despising others*. It shows a proud heart—a heart unlike Christ's—for heaven.—Edin. S. S. Lessons.

To repent of sin is as great a work of grace as not to sin.—Brooks.