

### ***A Stand-Up Routine!***

*Jeremiah 14<sup>7-10</sup>; Psalm 84<sup>1-7</sup>; 2 Timothy 4<sup>6-8,16-18</sup>; Luke 18<sup>9-14</sup>*

*God be merciful to me a sinner. [Luke 18<sup>13</sup>]*

We ended last week on a poem and start with one this week. It is a Scottish poem, *Holly Willie's Prayer*, by Robbie Burns (I shall endeavour to translate where necessary):

O Thou, that in the heavens does dwell,  
As it pleases best Thyself,  
Sends aen to Heaven an' ten to Hell,  
For Thy glory,  
And no for onie guid or ill  
They've done afore Thee!

I bless and praise Thy matchless might,  
When thousands Thou hast left in night,  
That I am here afore Thy sight,  
For gifts an' grace  
A burning and a shining light  
To a' this place.

What was I, or my generation,  
That I should get sic exaltation?  
I wha deserv'd most just damnation  
For broken laws,  
Six thousand years 'ere my creation,  
Thro' Adam's cause.

When from my mither's womb I fell,  
Thou might hae plung'd me deep in hell,  
To gnash my gums, and weep and wail,  
In burnin lakes,  
Where damned devils roar and yell,  
Chain'd to their stakes.

Yet I am here a chosen sample,  
To show thy grace is great and ample;  
I'm here a pillar o' Thy temple,  
Strong as a rock,  
A guide, a buckler, and example,  
To a' Thy flock.

Willie goes on to remind God that he is against drinking and dancing, cards and gambling, and then confesses his own difficulties with lust (O Lord! yestreen, Thou kens, wi' Meg) before asking God to curse some of his neighbours and the Presbytery of the Church of Scotland in Ayr. After an appeal that God will destroy people he doesn't like, Willie concludes:

But, Lord, remember me an' mine  
Wi' mercies temporal and divine,  
That I for grace an' gear may shine,  
Excell'd by nane,  
And a' the glory shall be Thine,  
Amen, Amen!

I think the connection to our Gospel reading is clear - God isn't looking for a stand-up comedy routine that pretends to be good, but for a simple approach in faith.

- ✦ The Pharisee wants to be seen and heard. He **isn't like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers or like this tax collector**. He then has to remind God that he **fast(s) twice a week** and he gives **a tenth of all his income**. If only he realised that God doesn't give out Oscars for prayer! Jesus is suggesting that God isn't even aware that this hypocrite is speaking.
- ✦ The Tax Collector stands with his head down and simply says, **God be merciful to me a sinner**. That is prayer! It is honest, without hypocrisy and asks for **mercy** rather than applause.

Paul points out the obvious - it is God who rewards. He awaits his execution and says **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith**.

If anyone could have listed achievements it is Paul (and he does elsewhere) but for now, when it really matters, all that there is faith. Two things matter:

- ✦ The **crown of righteousness** which is God's gift to all his faithful people
- ✦ The Glory of God - **to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen**.

If you want to try stand-up comedy, tell God about how good you are and how much you have done! Not everyone is as entertaining as Burn's when they recognise hypocrisy!

If you want to try faith, begin with repentance and let God do the rest!