

JESUS THE STORYTELLER

The Pharisee and The Tax Collector

DECEMBER 9, 2018

TODAY'S TEXT

Text: **Luke 18:9-14**

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' ¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' ¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

FIRST THOUGHTS

The best teachers do more than give you knowledge in the abstract. They want to make sure you understand what is being discussed. That is why good teachers give you examples, tell stories, draw pictures; they do whatever it takes to make sure you "get it" – that you are not just reciting a definition or an answer for an exam but that you understand the concept.

- Who was the best teacher you had in school? Who was the worst? What was the difference?

One of the defining doctrines of the Christian faith is "justification by faith alone" – the teaching that we are declared righteous before God through our faith in Christ and His work, not our own efforts. This "essential Christian doctrine" is vital for our faith.

In this session, we look at Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. We see the danger of self-righteousness, our human need for mercy, and what it means to be justified by faith. God calls us to recognize our sinfulness and our need for His mercy and in humility to proclaim the gospel of grace to those who trust in themselves.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

In previous sessions, we've seen how Jesus frequently told stories within a particular context to make a particular point.

- He told the parable of the unmerciful servant in response to Peter's question about how many times he had to forgive his brother.
- He told the parable of the good Samaritan in response to a man who asked, "Who is my neighbor?"
- He told the parable of the prodigal son after religious leaders criticized Him for welcoming to His table sinners who repent.

Jesus told stories that aimed for the hearts of His hearers. The parable we will look at here is similar to the others mentioned. Jesus told this story in order to address a spiritual need.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

JUSTIFICATION

> Read **Luke 18:9**

- What are two or three signs that someone is trusting in themselves that they are righteous?
- What are two or three signs that someone is looking down on others?
- When have you found yourself falling into this trap? (think socioeconomically, physically, education level, politically, racially, etc.)

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

> Read Luke 18:10-12

- If someone had accused the Pharisee of being self-righteous in that moment, how do you think he would have responded?
- What are some ways we can be self-righteous without knowing it?

It is misplaced trust that leads to misplaced judgement. As it has been said, "We judge others by their actions and ourselves by our intentions." We judge people around us more harshly than we would dare judge ourselves.

- Why is it easier to judge other people more harshly than we judge ourselves?
- What are some ways we can become self-aware of the stench of self-righteousness?

HUMILITY

> Read Luke 18:13-14

In contrast to the Pharisee who took his stand in the temple and prayed about himself, the tax collector took a much different approach.

- What do the differences between the prayer of the Pharisee and the prayer of the tax collector tell us about their attitudes?

Imagine if the story were told about a Christian social worker and a pedophile. If your sense of justice seems outraged at the idea that a repentant pedophile would leave justified instead of the Christian social worker, then you are beginning to understand the shocking power of the story. You are supposed to feel this way because this story is about the shocking truth of justification by faith alone—that it is not by works but by grace we are saved (see Eph. 2:8-9). If we are no longer scandalized by this story, it is because we have lost sight of just how revolutionary this doctrine is.

It is the Pharisee who protests God's gift of grace. It is the repentant heart that basks in this gift of love and is then transformed by it.

- What are the marks of someone who knows their need for grace?
- How do these marks differ from people who trust in themselves?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector gives us a vivid portrait of pride versus humility, of justification by works versus justification by faith.

"Pride preaches merit; humility pleads for compassion. Pride negotiates as an equal; humility approaches in need. Pride separates by putting down others; humility identifies with others, recognizing we all have the same need. Pride destroys through its alienating self-service; humility opens doors with its power to sympathize with the struggle we share. Pride turns up its nose; humility offers an open and lifted-up hand."

DARRELL L. BOCK

If self-righteousness gives off a stench, repentance and humility give us a fragrance. May our churches be marked by grace that scandalizes the Pharisee and that welcomes in the tax collector!

- Who do you need to welcome in today?

UPCOMING LESSONS

12/16/18

Jesus the Storyteller Week 6: The Wicked Tenants

READ THROUGH THE BIBLE

9th - 1 Timothy 5-6; Titus 1-3 | **10th** - 2 Timothy 1-4 | **11th** - Philemon; Hebrews 1-4 | **12th** - Hebrews 5-8 | **13th** - Hebrews 9-11 | **14th** - Hebrews 12-13; Jude | **15th** - James 1-5