

## Scripture Reading:

**Luke 18:9-14** “9 Also [Jesus] spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'”

# *"Being Justified Before God"*

We come this morning to the third lesson that Jesus teaches His disciples after the Pharisees had come asking about the Kingdom of God. Jesus first stressed that His disciples must stay focused on the Kingdom of God: Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to be the sacrifice for sin, to save His people from their sins. Jesus will ascend into heaven to reign from God's right hand sending the Holy Spirit down upon His Church: A Church that is commissioned to Disciple the Nations.

- We as the Disciples of Jesus, the Saints in His Church, must not lose sight of this mission!

As history moves on, we may become discouraged or doubtful about the advancement of the Kingdom and so the second lesson for the Disciples was for them to be persistent in prayer, trusting that God will “avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him!”

Now Jesus will deal with the opposite error: The opposite of being discouraged and doubtful is to become prideful and arrogant and that is what Jesus will address with another of the most famous parables:

- The account of the Pharisee and the Publican

**BUT** we must note that this lesson is being given to the disciples and any others who were listening as is clearly pointed out in verse 9: “[Jesus] spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, & despised others”

R.C. Ryle points out that “self-righteousness is a family disease born by all the children of Adam.”

C. S. Lewis rightly identified the “great sin” as PRIDE. In Mere Christianity he writes, “There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except

**Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty of themselves... There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others!"**

- **So we must be careful not to fall into the sin of pride by thinking this parable is aimed solely at the Pharisees...**

**Jesus tells us specifically that "He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others"**

- **This is THE lesson to be learned and it is important for all of us... For ALL of our lives!**

**In this parable we again meet two people: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector."**

- **Both went up to the Temple to pray: They were approaching God.**

**Jesus chooses these characters carefully, with the Pharisee bringing up the image of a pious religious man, someone who would approach God boldly! The other a tax collector, a publican, one of the most hated professions in the land... Not unlike our IRS agents today! Only imagine if you will that these same IRS agents not only collected what the Federal government demanded of your goods, but took whatever they could get away with so they could pocket the extra for themselves!**

- **Such was the case with these Jewish tax collectors who profited handsomely at others expense as they did Rome's bidding**

**The disciples would have been very tempted to look up to the Pharisee and to look down on the tax collector, the very problem this parable is intended to address.**

- **We should note that both men stood to pray and that was the normal custom.**

**It is assumed in the text that the Pharisee would have taken a prominent position and we are told that the publican stood afar off. The Pharisee stands before God for all to see while the publican does not want any public notice. In verse eleven we see the real problem with pride: "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself..."**

**This is certainly a picture of the "ME" generation: This Pharisee is so wrapped up in himself that God is just a bystander listening in as he prays to himself. This man is focused on himself and others rather than God. Lewis says later in his chapter on the Great Sin, "A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you."**

**Jesus tells us that "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector."**

- **The Pharisee sees himself as righteous because he is NOT like 'those' other people!**

Not only does he establish his good standing by comparing himself to others, but he goes on to argue that he can even beat God's standards:

12 "I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess."

- Truly this Pharisee was one who trusted in himself and despised others!
- We must ALWAYS remember "There but for the Grace of God go I!"

To help us avoid this, we should often review the words of Ephesians chapter one remembering who it is that does the 'doing' in these comforting verses...

Ephesians 1:2 "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory."

- ALL of that is true about us & we must never allow this grand & righteous standing before God to turn us into the prideful Pharisee in this parable!

Next we come to the tax collector or publican that we are supposed to relate to:

13 "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'"

- Again he does not stand in a prominent place, he is humbled in God's presence and knows the source of his salvation...

He beats his breast in a sign of contrition and then prays, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" Our English translations are pretty weak at this point: We need to see the full impact of what this man prayed to understand the conclusion that Jesus gives and to learn the right lessons for our lives... The Holman Christian Standard is better with this reading: "O God, turn Your wrath from me --a sinner!"

The publican is not asking God to show arbitrary mercy or pity, but rather that God would be satisfied, propitiated.

*Children... Remember what that BIG word means?*

**This is why the publican comes to the Temple to make his request known before the Holy God... R.C. Linski says the proper reading should be “God, let Thyself be propitiated in regard to me, the open sinner”**

**Mr. Linski says the publican rightly approached God in His Temple, “because there is forgiveness with God, His Temple is open to sinners, He has provided expiation for their sins, and this is applied to sinners in His Temple, and his Word declares all this and seals the forgiveness. This publican was a Jew who knows all this and was now taking action upon it. It was this Gospel provision of the old covenant that drew him in the first place.”**

**Just as Simeon held the baby Jesus and could declare, “My eyes have seen your salvation,” so this publican knew and believed in salvation by grace foretold by the Prophet Isaiah:**

- **All of Isaiah chapter 53 can be your homework: BUT here are just a few excerpts that CLEARLY point to the grace that Paul explained in Ephesians chapter one.**

**“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? ... 4 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. ... For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. ...He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.”**

**This is why Jesus could then declare:**

**14 “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other;”**

- **This man is justified before God: Justified by saving faith!**

**The conclusion that Jesus draws is where we find our lesson for today: “for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” ”**

**The Pharisee exalted himself, standing in the prominent place, praying to himself, looking down at others: Clearly seeing their sins but unable to see any in himself. In Matthew chapter seven near the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus describes such a man when he says, “Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’” Jesus says all those who have exalted themselves will hear are these humbling and chilling words from our Savior: “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”**

**With the publican we have just the opposite. A man who stands afar off and does not consider the sins of others or make comparison or bring forward his good works... NO he sees himself as THE sinner... This man says with the Apostle Paul, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." No comparison or rationalizing just an honest appeal to our gracious God to propitiate the wrath due us because of OUR sins.**

**IF we are going to be God's faithful servants in His kingdom we must:**

- **Keep our focus on the advancement of His Kingdom**
- **Be persistent in our prayers for the advancement of His Kingdom**
- **AND we must always walk humbly before our God**

**We must come each week to worship God with the attitude of this publican: Beating our breast as we honestly confess our sins of omission and commission. We must then hear and trust the Good News that God has propitiated His wrath being both just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus!**

**Jesus declares that this man went home justified: Each week we rise as God's justified people and enter His presence to be instructed from His Word. Because we are justified we stand before God in white robes of righteousness – The very righteousness of Jesus – the Father is pleased to accept our gifts and prayers. Jesus comes and invites us to dine at His Table and then He sends us forth to be the laborers in the field that is white unto harvest.**

**We must avoid the sin of the Pharisee who came to the Temple to show off his good works and tell God how much better he is than the run of the mill sinner! He might have been in the right place but he did not take entering God's presence seriously and thus he ended up praying to himself.**

- **Truly answering God's call to worship will lead to proper confession and the knowledge that we are righteous before God!**
- **We must NEVER take either of these for granted or allow them to become routine**
- **This is why we take weekly covenant renewal worship seriously here at Church of the King**
- **We must remind our children!**

**Jesus has taught His disciples three simple but very important lessons:**

- **IF we don't keep our focus on the Kingdom of God we will quickly be distracted with the cares of this world and succumb to temptations from the world, the flesh and the devil.**

- **As we strive to advance God’s Kingdom we will grow weary and frustrated at times not understanding how God has planned things, and thus we must be persistent in our prayers claiming and believing the promises that have been given.**
- **And finally, as God uses us as His Saints in His Church to advance His Kingdom we must guard against that great sin pride**

**Even in times of great achievement we must come humbly before our God as this publican did confessing our sin and trusting ONLY in God for our salvation!**

**We must never be the Pharisee who compares his life with that of others and says to God, ‘look at me and all I have done!’**

**In his 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistle to the Church at Corinth, Paul puts it this way: II Corinthians 10:12 “For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”**

**In a moment we will sing a great hymn of the faith as our response that is based on I Corinthians chapter three where Paul says, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”**

- **Jesus warned His disciples to beware the leaven of the Pharisees whose focus was on themselves**
- **Our focus is to be on Jesus!**

**Peter gives similar instructions to young people and all of us in his first Epistle and provides a good final summary of the lessons that Jesus has given His disciples on this final journey to Jerusalem: I Peter 5:5 “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, ALL of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. 8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. 10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. 11 To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

### **Communion Meditation:**

**Romans 5 - 1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”**