

Who's Righteous?

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Bible Text: Luke 18:9-14

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Let's open our Bibles and let's go back to Luke 18. We'll look at verses 9 through 14. Luke 18:9-14. I know you won't believe it but once again Christ is going to publicly correct, humiliate and shame the teachings of the religious authorities of his day and I thought, you know, as a parallel for us as we think about the many errors that, well, in every generation, they creep into sound doctrine and it's our job as pastors, it's our job as faithful Christians to correct what's in the public domain that is misleading men and help leading them to eternal ruin. I mean, the Lord is like that piledriver that I saw on my vacation that time. They were building a new condo complex and every day wham, wham, wham. They would drop that heavy weight from that crane and keep driving those piles into the earth so they would have a good foundation. Well, that's what the Lord is doing to the Pharisees. Every week, wham, wham, wham. I'm so amused at the liberals' view of Jesus as some weak, wimpy, meek guy that didn't press his authority and his strength. Well, he certainly does press his authority and his strength and we see it again in this text. It's very penetrating what he's saying here and stirring and it has been to my soul all week long.

Luke 18, beginning in verse 9,

9 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' 13 But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

I've entitled this exposition "Who is Righteous?" Who's righteous? Let's talk about righteousness for just a moment. First of all, let me say a word about inherent righteousness. Inherent righteousness is God's righteousness which means it's a part of his very being. It's a part of God's essential nature. God didn't become righteous, he just is

righteous. He gives righteousness its definition. The idea of righteousness is moral uprightness, correctness, moral and ethical purity. God just is that. God cannot not be righteous. It's inherent in his very being.

Secondly, God has mandatory righteousness which means that since God is righteous, he mandates all of his creatures also to be righteous. In other words, God is so God and God is so purely righteous he cannot allow anything unrighteous to go unpunished. Did you understand that?

He can't be God and be righteous and not mandate righteousness of his creatures which leads, of course, to the third thing: punitive righteousness which means that God being just and being fully righteous must and will punish justly all unrighteousness. So wherever God find someone who falls short, someone who does not have moral and ethical uprightness and purity, then God will bring just punitive effects against them. We know that's why there's eternal hell. God's righteousness will be upheld and God's righteousness will be glorified. Those who are saved, his righteousness through grace will be glorified in their eternal salvation in heaven. Those that are not saved, his eternal righteous judgment will be exercised against those in hell, but God's righteousness will be upheld.

Fourthly, praise his name, there is redemptive righteousness which means that God has a morally pure, upright and perfect way, now listen, of making the unrighteous righteous in his eyes. That is, God doesn't just say, "Well, you're impure and you're corrupt and you ought to be judged but I think I'll just be gracious and overlook it." God cannot do that but he has a way whereby he can uphold righteous justice and call the unrighteous righteous in his eyes. That's through the merits of his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, our substitutionary sacrifice, the vicarious one for us, is the one who makes us obtain a righteousness before God. He redeems us from the place of ruin and places us in a position of righteousness through the merits of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Now, closely tied to this is imputed righteousness. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, imputed into Jesus was our unrighteousness and at the same time, imputed into God's children was Christ's righteousness. We didn't earn it. We didn't merit it. We didn't achieve it in any way, shape or fashion. It was a free gift of grace and placed in us and given to us for our accounting before God was the very righteousness of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Imputed righteousness.

You can take the last 2, redemptive righteousness and imputed righteousness, and you can just put the word out beside them "justification." Justification. When we have God imputing his righteousness to us and redeeming us from ruin, we instantly stand as just in this infinitely holy and just God's esteem of us. What a powerful thing that is.

So we come to a verse of Scripture now where the Apostle Paul is talking to Jews and Greeks. Now, in Paul speaking to Jews and Greeks, he's speaking to all known human beings on the earth anywhere. You're either a Jew or a Greek or a Jew or a Gentile, alright? And he says this in Romans 3:10, "For there is none righteous, not even one."

There is none righteous, not even one. That means in and of yourself as it pertains to your ability, your inherent quality, your capacity to achieve or merit, no one will ever be righteous in God's eyes so therefore you stand before God's mandatory and punitive righteousness to be judged forever.

So the question is: how do we get in on the redemptive righteousness and the imputed righteousness that God offers? Who is righteous? Who gets to receive? Who gets to stand in? Who gets to glory in? Who gets the blessings of knowing they have redemptive and imputed righteousness? Well, that's what this parable about Jesus teaches us so very clearly.

Let's look at it together. Luke 18, I. in our outline will be: the audience to whom the parable was given. Let's look at the audience to whom the parable was given. We see in verse 9 something very interesting, "And He told this parable to some people," and I think that means the religious authorities and everyone else, notice, "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt." Now, of course, primarily he's focusing this on the religious authorities or the Pharisees so when I say the Jewish religious authorities or the religious authorities or the Pharisees, the same people, okay? I'm talking about the same people every time because they were the ones who selfishly and were full of self-confidence and exalted themselves as pure and holy and they looked at all others as being beneath them. They had contempt for them.

Now, the Lord's going to talk about prayer here and he's going to talk about these 2 guys going to the temple to pray but let's remember the context. He's already taught us in the last session in Luke 18:1-8 that we ought to pray earnestly and persevere in our prayers and never give up hope and trust in God and God's truth and God's word even though dark and difficult days will come against true believers, we keep persevering on in prayer. Now he's going to tell us, "Don't just persevere in prayer but you must also pray in humility." So you pray with perseverance, that's the last lesson, but you pray with humility. But in both cases, the emphasis is not on the motions of prayer, it's not on the activity of prayer, it's on the heart that gives the prayer. You see, the new regenerate heart will be a heart that perseveres even though dark and difficult days will come and the new regenerate heart is a heart that is humble before a holy God. Those 2 are always true of the regenerate heart.

Now, so he's talking to these religious authorities and he's talking to these people in general and he says, verse 9, these are they "who trusted in themselves." What a statement: trusted in themselves. You know, no deceit is so dangerous as self-deceit. When you deceive yourself, it's the most dangerous of all. Now, the Pharisees to whom this is primarily addressed, were but raw, self-confident, brazen legalists. They were men with badly diseased souls. You know, insensibility to the body produces death to the body and insensibility to the condition of the heart produces death to the soul and that's where they were. They were totally without discernment about the true status and character of their hearts before a holy God. They trusted in themselves.

Now, these types who trust in themselves, they believe they are holy and these Pharisees believed they were holy. They thought they were so good and so impressive and so amazing that God would be in debt to them. "Why God, just be glad to have us." I remember it wasn't an uncommon phrase many years ago when I first became a Baptist and first became a preacher. I thank God I became a Christian first but it was common to hear Baptists in our denomination meetings say, "Well, we Baptist ain't much but we're the best God has." I thought, "Well, God could raise up rocks to praise him if he wants to. He didn't have to settle for the best Baptists have."

The text not only says they trusted in themselves, verse 9, but these are people who view others with contempt. You know, when you're self-ignorant, that is, you don't know the real true condition of your own heart, when you're self-ignorant, it always leads to self-conceit and self-conceit always leads to contempt of others. That's where they were. Brothers and sisters, as a point of practical application for church life, that's why you've got to have strong, true, Bible preaching so that we know what we are before a holy God. So that we are not self-deceived. So that we are not conceited about how good we think we might be. And so that we don't with arrogance begin to look contemptibly on others as if we have achieved above them.

In contrast, the one who has true self-knowledge, that leads to humility which leads to kindness to others and when a man justifies himself, his own mouth condemns him. The Apostle Paul reflected on this in 2 Corinthians 10:12 when he said, "For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding." In other words, we can always find somebody sorer than we are. We can always find somebody more rotten than we are and feel a little bit better about ourselves but the Scripture says that when you do that, you don't have any understanding. There is one standard all men must measure themselves by and that is God. You will either match him or have eternal ruin, period. Period.

So the description produced by this verse that Jesus actually has to say to these folks, "I want to give you a parable and it's about those who trust in themselves that they are righteous and they look down on everybody else." It's such an unspiritual and unattractive picture of the people of the day that it's painful to think on. Can you imagine going to church with a great majority of people who were full of themselves? Where the great majority of the congregation gloried in their own self-righteousness and looked down on the others around them? What an awful situation that would be.

Well, that's the audience, those who trust in themselves that they are righteous and looked down on others as being beneath them with contempt. Now, secondly, in verse 10, notice the actors in the parable. Jesus is going to give a parable to teach this lesson and he gives us the setting. He says, verse 10, "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector." So, first of all, let's talk about where they're going that these 2 men are going up to the temple to pray. Now, that's not unusual at all. As a matter of fact, Jewish custom was that you when up at 9 o'clock in the morning and 3 in the afternoon and it certainly wasn't unusual as you went up to the temple to have

somebody else kind of walk beside you and you kind of join up and you go up there and you pray together. So that was not unusual at all but what was really unusual was that this self-righteous holy man, the Pharisee, should be joined by the wicked tax collector and go up together. Now, that would have drawn a lot of attention. I mean, immediately the people around would have been poking, "Look! Look! Look!" because the Pharisee was esteemed as all the great and holy men of the community and the tax collector was esteemed by everybody as the most wicked of the wicked.

But I think there's of little lesson here. Can I give you this side note lesson? They go up to the temple to pray. We've got to remember that the temple is a type of Christ. Where they went up to the temple to pray, we go through Christ in prayer. He's our temple that gives us access to God. So many today though, still go to the place of worship but fail to go to the Christ to worship. You can go to every geographical, physical place you want to but if you don't go through Christ, you don't have an audience with God. Christ is our temple whereby we gain access to God. Isaiah 29:13, speaks of those who go through the motions of praying or religious service but their hearts aren't in it, "Then the Lord said, 'Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote.'" Their religion teaches them, "Do this. Now do that. Follow this observance. Do that observance. On this day do this. On this day do that. Give this much of your money to somebody else. Do this and do that." And God says, "Your heart is not in it. You're just going through the motions thinking you can please me by this work you're doing."

That's the way the Pharisee was. Let's talk about him for just a moment. The Pharisee was a self-appointed holy man of the nation of Israel. Now, one might argue, "Well, they're not self-appointed, the Pharisees appointed one another." Well, my point is God didn't appoint him as a holy man. They designated themselves as that. They paraded in external righteousness but had not the heart reality of a man of God. They were classic hypocrites. They were the worst of the wicked and as we have seen over and over in Luke, as Van Doren, a commentator writer that I found is very rich on Luke, he said, "The Lord Jesus does nothing less than declare war on these guys." And haven't we seen it chapter after chapter after chapter after chapter? He just lashes out and just decimates their argument and their viewpoints and their doctrine. And by the way, he does it in public.

So there's an application for us and that is: from the beginning there have been Pharisees, the worst of the worst go up to God's house. There's always been good men and bad men who have come to God's house. It's been this way since the fall. After Adam and Eve fell in the garden of Eden, they have children and what happens? We have Cain and Abel. They both come to the house of worship. Cain brings the work of his hands, proud of himself, proud of what he accomplished as a sacrifice. Abel, the righteous one, brings a slaughtered animal to signify, "Someone beyond me must make the sacrifice to make me presentable." Good men, Abel, bad men, Cain, for all these centuries have been coming to the house of God.

In this day, we have this self-righteous Pharisee who is going up to the temple to pray and you've got to remind yourselves that the common people were dazzled by these guys. They basically fell in line. They may have been troubled in their hearts about it but they basically believed that religion was doing certain works, doing certain rituals, jumping through the hoops and that the Pharisees did better than everybody else. So they were dazzled by these guys.

So that's the Pharisee going up to pray. Notice next here, the tax collector, Jesus says. One was a Pharisee, the other is a tax collector. Now, your Bible may say publican, it's the same thing, it just means a tax collector. Now, don't misunderstand me: the tax collectors were not inherently good, they are very bad. These were bad guys but the difference was everybody believed they were bad guys. They knew the tax collectors were wicked. In fact, the Jewish nation in general viewed a Jewish tax collector as an apostate. They had forsaken the Jews and the brethren to join in league with our Roman captors and exorcise taxes for Rome from their Jewish brethren. So they were considered the worst of the worst. As a matter of fact, in Matthew 21:31, Jesus ranks tax collectors with prostitutes.

So they are bad guys. But what is interesting in the eyes of the people these 2, the Pharisee is a holy man and a saint but the tax collector is an evil man and a wicked one. That's the way the culture viewed them and it's important to remember that. So remember these 2 actors on the stage: the Pharisee, the religious authority of the day who esteemed himself as holy and righteous and the people generally believe that; the tax collector, a lowdown traitor, apostate, who had joined in league with Rome and helped extort taxes. And they could charge anybody any tax they wanted as long as Rome got what they wanted so they really robbed and swindled and took advantage of their own people.

Well, let's look at the contrast of hearts. III. The contrast of hearts. Beginning in verse 11, we see the Pharisee first. First of all, the Bible says, "The Pharisee stood and was praying." Now, standing and praying was the custom of the day. Jews basically stood with their eyes toward heaven and their hands raised when they went to the temple and prayed. But I think it's interesting that the text says he stood there "praying to himself." Is that not interesting? He stood there praying to himself because that's exactly what he did. He was not praying to God. You see, he worshiped himself so he prays to himself. Have you ever known people that it seemed like when they prayed they really weren't praying to God? Well, the Pharisees never did. They always prayed to themselves.

Now, this self-righteous Pharisee was doubtlessly grieved because he's standing there at the temple with this wretched tax collector and he's thinking, "I've got to pray to my God with this wretched sinner beside me," the pure and holy one. He prays loudly, of course. He's praying so that others will hear him. He's but an actor on the stage and God is not his audience. He's only interested in the esteem of men. He's very confident in himself and he's very confident in his own works before God. Romans 9:32 says, "Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but they pursued it as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone." Listen to me: if you have a notion in your heart and mind and it is the most logical notion to the fallen, natural heart and that is that somehow

"I perform certain things and God accepts me," you can go to all the religions all over the world and you'll find that basic premise. "We do certain things, we go to certain temples or certain buildings, we perform certain rites or certain rituals, we give certain amounts of money. We do these good things and it offsets the bad things and God accepts me." The Jews were teaching and believing that. Roman Catholicism basically teaches and believes that. The Hindus basically teach and believe that. The Islamists basically teach and believe that. We do these right things and it offsets those bad things and God will accept us and we're pleasing. What does Paul say in Romans? "If you believe that, you have stumbled over the stumbling stone. You've missed the whole thing." Of course, that's where this Pharisee is.

In verse 11, he continues on in his prayer and he says, "God," and I think that's an arrogant statement. Here in his own self-righteousness he has this sinful familiarity with God that indicates he has a totally un-humbled heart. He goes up to pray but he never does. He doesn't entreat God for grace. He doesn't plead with God for mercy or for unmerited favor. He doesn't ask God for forgiveness because he doesn't feel he needs any of these. Why, he's so wonderful God must be blessed to just have his attention. He's totally ignorant of his sin, his guilt and his need of grace. Someone said a prayer without humble repentance is a bird without wings. My friend, listen to me: humility is the keystone in the arch of prayer. You don't come to God full of yourself. You don't come to God confident in your religious works. You come to God with bold confidence only in the merits of his Son, Jesus Christ.

He continues on, this Pharisee does, as he's acting out before the people so that they might think wonderful things about him. He says, "I thank You, God, that I am not like other people." You know, true prayer is when you go to God completely bankrupt and desperately needy. This Pharisee goes to God, again, needing nothing. He's all sufficient, saying he's better than everyone else. Then he lists some wicked people. He says, "I'm not like the swindlers," verse 11, "who are robbers." That's those who take other's money or goods in an unjust way. The whole time he's got his eye cracked around toward the tax collector because he considers the tax collector a swindler, he takes people's money unjustly. Then he says, "I thank you that I'm not unjust. I don't defraud others under the guise of justice." Then he says, "I thank you that I'm not an adulterer. I'm so wonderful and I'm so good." Then he just lays it out there, "I thank you that I'm not like this tax collector," he says. What's his point? "I am righteous and all the world is sinners." He's playing God here. He denounces this poor tax collector as if he knows the man's heart. However, we must say this for this Pharisee, this religious elitists of the Jews: he is sincere. He sincerely believes in himself. He sincerely believes in himself and he prays in absolute faith in himself. That's where he is.

Now, unless we get out of balance, you know balance is a word I think we need to use a lot in preaching truth today. There's a balance in truth here as this Pharisee calls out sin, we do understand and know that sometimes good and truly righteous and faithful men and women must call out evil and call it evil. However, when we call out evil from our hearts, we simultaneously confess to God, "God, we are at least evil or more evil than the evil we're calling out except grace has given us a different heart." It's much like we saw,

what, a week or so ago in Psalm 139. Psalm 139:21-24, notice the balance in David's heart. He says, "Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; They have become my enemies." So David says, "I hate those who hate You, God. I hate those who hate righteousness." But then notice he talks about his own need and weakness, verse 23, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way." In other words, "God, I know better than those who hate you unless you keep me, unless you change my heart and keep me, I'll be worse than the wicked that I hate." Do you see the balance? We do call out evil but we're humble that the only difference in us is God's grace.

Well, this Pharisee goes on. He's just full of himself. He says in verse 12, "I fast twice a week." Now, scholars tell us that the only fast required by Jewish law of this day was to fast on the great Day of Atonement, one day a year. I understand that modern Orthodox Jews fast 28 days a year. Well, this guy in effect adds 103 extra fast days to what was required by the law. You know why he added more? Because whatever else the common man did, he had to do more to show he was more holy. Every religion does this. You always have holy men who take what the average dedicated person would do and they do more so that people can esteem them and brag on them and think they are wonderful and holy. Now, there are true, genuine, humble, righteous people who do fast more and pray more and honor God more in many ways than other people but they don't do it for show. As a matter fact, they try to hide it. This guy didn't want to hide anything. He wants everybody to know that he fasts twice a week.

But he was just like the other Pharisees of his day. These religious authorities added the number of fasts to their lives but they had added nothing to their righteousness and spirituality. You know, isn't it true that the more works and external rituals that we add to our lives if we are looking to them to attain righteousness, the deeper we sink and the more we're unrighteous? Everything you do, everything you perform if you're looking to that to somehow make you acceptable and pleasing to God or gain a standing before God, if you look to that, every time you do something, give another thousand dollars or \$10,000 or a million dollars, whatever it is, anything you do and you look to that and think, "Surely God likes me better now," it just makes you more despicable in God's eyes. You sink ever deeper when you do that.

A couple of cross references from ancient Israel because they fell into the same stuff. Zechariah 7:5, "Say to all the people of the land and to the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted?'" "Was your heart bent toward loving me and honoring me or were you saying, 'I'll do these things and then I'll get an advantage'"? Look, you don't use God for your advantage, you just love God and are glad to serve him. Isaiah 58:3, they are complaining to God here, "'Why have we fasted and You do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?' Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, And drive hard all your workers." They're saying, "We did these things. We jumped through the hoops. We performed these works and, God, you haven't blessed us back." And God says, "Of course I haven't blessed you. You didn't fast for me. You

fasted for you. It wasn't about loving me and advancing my name and honoring my kingdom. It was about you." Can I just get down to where the rubber meets the road? Do you know there are millions of Baptists today who walked down the aisle and said the prayer not for God but that they might jump through the hoop and check that off and go back to their worldly life. And Catholics have their motions. And Presbyterians have their motions. And Assemblies of God. There are true believers in all of these groups but so many of them are misled by the stuff that's not biblical that we tag onto the Gospel and it's no different than this Pharisee who tagged on stuff in his life and thought, "That's going to make me pleasing to God."

Well lastly, he's not through bragging on himself before God here and, of course, he's got his eye cracked to make sure people are hearing him. He says, "I pay tithes of all that I get." Anything wrong with tithing? No. A true child of God should start with returning a tithe. This guy shows no spirit of owing anything to God. Again, he seeks no pardon. He seeks no salvation from ruin. He seeks no grace. He believes he's always all paid up and always in good shape with God. And, again, by saying, "I pay tithes of everything," he means to imply, "I go above what other people would do." Now, some very committed and godly people do more than a tithe but they do it from a heart of gratitude that they get to honor God's work, not to somehow gain God's favor.

So the proud fool with boundless arrogance exalts himself before God and above others and especially he's wanting to exalt himself over this poor tax collector that's standing beside him. Well, that's the Pharisee standing and praying. Let's look at the tax collector now. Verse 13 says, "But the tax collector," there's a contrast, conjunctive word that means you need to get the contrast here. First of all, the text says in verse 13, "the tax collector was standing some distance away." He didn't feel worthy to be close to God's temple. You know, it's interesting that though he was some distance away from the temple, the reality was he wasn't far from God at all. You know, only one thing creates a gulf between us and God, it's just human pride and lack of repentance.

This tax collector is no doubt under the Spirit's conviction. Get that. He's no doubt been wrought upon by the convincing, convicting work of the Holy Spirit of God and this is his first exercise in repentance. Now, once again, you understand now, repentance is not something you did, being a repenter is something you became. Once you repent of sin, you're always a repenter until you get glorified in heaven. This guy, this is his first time to really feel the weight of his sin and begin to be a repenter before God but it's not going to be his last time. The Spirit has seized his heart and he sees boldly and clearly his sin and his guilt before God.

Verse 13 continues, he's even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven. The common custom was to look to heaven and raise your hands but his heart is burdened with the sin he finds within. He doesn't yet feel the assurance of grace's forgiving and grace's mercy. While the Pharisee cast his eye around for admirers, this tax collector cannot see anything but his own sin and his own guilt. Have you had those moments with God when somehow in your quiet time, in your Bible study, sitting under the preaching of the word, you were so aware that, "Oh God," like this man, he didn't say, "I am a sinner," he said, "I

am the sinner." You're so aware of your guilt. You're so aware of your fallenness before this infinitely holy and beautiful and all wise God that you can't even think on other men's failures. Your failure is what's great. That's where he is. I want to tell you, the night that I was converted driving my car through Columbia, Tennessee, I'm telling you, I didn't have the slightest notion another sinner existed in the universe but I knew I was a sinner. That's where he is. That's where he is.

Psalm 40:12, the psalmist had a season like this. I'm not suggesting that true Christians have this all the time but we ought to know some seasons like this, "For evils beyond number have surrounded me; My iniquities have overtaken me," notice this, "so that I am not able to see; They are more numerous than the hairs of my head, And my heart has failed me." I just feel like getting on my face. I don't have the heart strength to move before God.

He continues on in verse 13, this tax collector standing before the temple praying. The Bible says, "he was beating his breast," beating on his chest, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" The sinner. Why is he doing that? He senses, "I am vile and wretched in the core of my being. Sin is not something I do, sin is something I am. Depravity and wickedness is not an act I perform. Yes, I do that but I am wicked in my heart and in my nature. Oh, what I am! What I am! What I am before this God!" Have you been there? Have you been there? You must go there to know God and to know Christ and to know salvation. Be through with your pride. Be through with your arrogance. Be through with your confidence. Humble yourself, sinner, before God and you'll know his grace and his peace and his forgiveness.

This tax collector's heart bursts forth in this desperate cry for mercy. Is it not true that the really broken heart has few words? "Be merciful to me, a sinner." The light, happy heart, lots of words but the broken heart. Can I just say this? And please understand the balance in my heart. I know good godly and genuine people, I think I'm one of those genuine people, have gone to sinners with little formulas, "Hey, pray this. Do this." If you would have walked up to this man at this time and said, "Pray this prayer," he would have said, "Shut up and get away from me. My heart is broken and I'm just yearning for the mercies of God." He wasn't interested in little man-made systems. He's meeting with God.

This tax collector, you see, is a model of the new regenerate heart. He's not looking to any formulas, nothing prescribed, no ritual, no memorized chants or mantras. He just has a deep, true feeling of his sin and a deep, deep, desire to somehow gain God's favor and God's mercy as a sinner. He looks forward and he longs for grace and for that alone, listen friend, the most eloquent prayer and most effectual prayer to the ears of God is the genuine, humble moanings of a broken sinner crying for mercy.

The Pharisee, he trusted in his merit. He trusted in his tithe giving. He trusted in his fasting. The tax collector flees only to the city of mercy and he makes his altar there. You know, when the Spirit of God works on a man's heart, he gives him 2 telescopes in his heart. One telescope is focused inwardly that he might see with clarity and in focus the real condition of his wretched heart. The other telescope is focused outwardly that he

might see salvation is only through Jesus Christ and his atoning death for you on the cross. He says here, "I am the sinner." That's that word that means missed the mark. It means, "I in every way, shape and in every fashion am a failure before this God to whom I must answer. I do not measure up to him. I cannot deserve to be with him. I am rotten to the core."

You say, "Pastor, if we are that radically depraved and wretched and ruined and a holy and just God absolutely must crush us in wrath to uphold his justice, then what can we do? We have no merit, no esteem, no virtue, no power whereby we might gain him. What can we do?" I remind you of what the preacher told Stonewall Jackson's troops. One night before the Confederate troops were going to a terrible, terrible battle, Stonewall Jackson knew that many of them would die the next day so he summoned a nearby pastor. It's a true story. The pastor came and preached to those thousands of Confederate soldiers. Do you know what he preached on? Are you strapped in? The doctrine of election. He got to the end of his sermon and he said to those men, a lot of them country boys who had never been out of their own county until they signed up to fight for the Confederacy, he said, "You will ask me if God is just and God has his elect then what can we do?" He said, "You're like the man on the second story of his house and he hears something and he smells something and he hears the scream, 'Your house is on fire!' and he looks and the steps are already blazing upward. He has not time to grab anything, secure anything and it is too far to climb out. He can only go to the window and cry for mercy."

Sinner, you listen to this pastor: that's all you have. You just go to the window and cry for mercy, "I'm a sinner. I can bring nothing. Do nothing. Perform nothing. Go anywhere. I've just got to have mercy. If you don't give it free, I perish." You run to the window and you cry for mercy. But I've got good news: "Whosoever, whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." If you go to that window and cry for mercy, that's enough. That's enough for the God who saves by grace.

Verse 14 and we'll conclude. Jesus gives his interpretive commentary on the situation. The self-assured, arrogant hypocrite, esteemed holy man Pharisee is praying. The tax collector that everybody knew was wicked, considered an apostate and he was wicked, he's praying. The Pharisee congratulated himself and bragged on his righteousness and his goodness. The tax collector said, "There's nothing in me. I'm beating on my breast. God, have mercy on me, the sinner." You see, Jesus knows the counsel of God and the condition of men. Look at what he says, verse 14, he says, "I tell you, this man," the tax collector, "went to his house justified." Justification which means he went having received God's redemptive righteousness and God's imputed righteousness. "This man went to his house justified rather than the other," the Pharisee, "for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

So here he declares the Pharisee's prayer at the temple that day went unanswered but the tax collector's prayer which is the briefest prayer recorded in Scripture, was answered. This tax collector's prayer was full of truth. First of all, it had the objective truth that, "I know God is holy and just and I know I'm a sinner and I'm ruined before him." It had

truth in it but not only objective truth, conversion involves experiential truth. You are not converting because in your mind you grasp these things, you're converting because in your heart these things grasp you. They get you and they don't let you go. Experiential truth, full of sorrow before God as a sinner. True sorrow. He gets it in his mind and he feels the weight in his heart but also full of blessings because God forgave him and cleansed him of all sin. The Pharisee leaves the temple full of pride and self-righteousness with the wrath of God abiding on him. The tax collector went home a new man with not a tithe but his whole heart and whole life consecrated to God. Walking home in Christ's righteousness. That's a great way to go home from church, right there. Walk home in Christ's righteousness. "Throwing away everything and every notion and every philosophy and every religious thought and every teaching and everything men might say I do. I reject it all. I reject any Baptist notion that violates Scripture. I reject any Catholic teaching that violates Scripture. I reject everything that Hindus and Muslims and whoever teaches. I take Christ and turn my back on the rest." When you do that, you go home righteous. You go home righteous. Great way to go home from church right there.

Romans 8:1 says, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment," that's over forever, "but has passed out of death into life." One man this day compared himself with others, the other man compared himself with God. One counted his goodness, the other counted his sins. You see, pride is the proverbial fly in the ointment. Pride corrupts and cancels out every good work, every virtue, every religious performance you may do because you do it thinking you're doing something. "I'm obtaining something." You can obtain nothing but hell.

Gospel application to our hearts is the only cure. The Gospel leads us to the depths. If you have the Gospel preached to you faithfully, you'll be in church thinking "Oh God, I feel awful." It leads you to the depths of seeing your depravity and it leads you to the heights of communion with God. Both are true in Gospel preaching.

He who humbles himself will be exalted. The only place on earth where we can find God and commune with God is the place of humility. Who is righteous? The humble one who admits he's a sinner and a wretch, worthy of the wrath of God. He doesn't care about the worst sinner in town that's next to him, he can only see his own wretched need and he looks only to Christ to save him. Listen to me: there's no such thing, listen to me, there's no such thing as an un-humbled Christian if you know this Christ. Now, you may not walk in it like you ought to, that's true of all of us, but if you know this Christ, there's the ever abiding seed of humility. We say like Paul, "I am what I am by the grace of God." We do have some that visit us un-humbled and join us un-humbled and stay a while un-humbled and then leave un-humbled but if God humbles you, you'll love the Christ we love and you'll love the Christ we serve and you'll love the brothers and sisters Christ died to save. All of God's people said, Amen.