

“Religious Brats”

Text: Luke 7:29-35

Today I want to approach this passage with puritan plainness. I’m just going to explain it and then apply it to us. The question I want to answer is simply this: What do religious brats look like? We’re going to see what religious brats looked like in Jesus’ day and then extract principles for today. Essentially, we’re asking two questions: What does this text say? And so what?

Let’s read Luke 7:29-35.

“And all the people that heard *him*, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But wisdom is justified of all her children.”

I. What is this text about?

What did religious brats look like then? Chapter 7 of Luke deals with the men and ministries of Jesus and John the Baptist. Jesus addresses questions about Himself and John. The questions of what is Jesus’ view of Himself? and what is Jesus’ view of John? were previously addressed. In addressing both of these questions our Lord certifies his own ministry and certifies John’s ministry too.

Now we reach verses 29-35 and learn how the people and their leaders reacted to Jesus’ endorsements of Himself and John. Also, Jesus gives a parable here in which He chides Israel for rejecting Himself and John. Very fittingly, Darrell Bock in his commentary calls this “The parable of the brats.” The people are like a bunch of spoiled brats who refuse to cooperate. Why? Because they don’t like the way things are going with John & Jesus. Ironically, as Jesus points out, they reject Him and John for the exact opposite reasons. Like all unbelieving people, there’s no pleasing them. And the real reason for rejecting both John and Jesus wasn’t so much the style as it was the substance of the message they brought.

In verses 29-30 give us the two different responses to John and his ministry. There is the favorable response of the people and tax collectors and the unfavorable response of the religious leaders. You might actually see this in your copy of the Scriptures, but these two verses are parenthetical. Verse 28 Jesus is commenting on John and those that are “least in the kingdom of God.” In verse 31, Jesus will resume his comments with the parable of the brats. So Luke is sticking his narrative remarks in between Jesus’ address to the large crowd gathered around him. The natural question is why? Why is Luke by the HS interrupting Jesus’ words with these verses here and what are they saying? From a structural point of view, verses 29-30 act as a bridge statement. Luke’s parenthesis take us from Jesus’ positive evaluation of John to Jesus’ negative evaluation of that current generation based on their rejection of John and thereby Himself. Really, Luke’s commentary at this point gives another voice joining Jesus’ to the legitimacy of John’s ministry despite being in prison because of his stand against Herod’s immoral marriage.

There is a clear delineation in Luke’s comments of those that receive and reject John and by extension Jesus because John was the one to prepare the way for Jesus. “All the people and the tax collectors” acknowledged and declared the justice of God. “The Pharisees and lawyers [experts in the law, scribes]” rejected God’s

purpose for themselves. “All the people and the tax collectors” “were baptized with John’s baptism”. “The Pharisees & scribes” were not baptized with John’s baptism.” So Luke’s point is that those who followed John were following God and those that rejected John were ultimately rejecting God’s purpose for themselves.

This rejection is tragically ironic, because of all people the Pharisees and lawyers should have known and embraced the purposes of God, but did not do so. In fact, to be a scribe you were ordained for that service only after years of studying at the feet of a rabbi. There would be three stages to his education: Stage 1: A scribe would just be a student. If you were a scribe, you’d watch and learn meticulously from his teacher to the point that he would scrutinize the teacher’s hand gestures. Stage 2: A scribe would assume the status of an “unordained scholar”. This just meant that he had gotten to the point that he’d mastered traditional material and the *halakic* methods and was able to render personal decisions on questions. Stage 3: Once reaching the age for ordination he could be considered a full scholar. Once attaining this status, he’d be called rabbi (a teacher of the law) and therefore could render decisions – make judicial decisions in criminal proceedings and civil matters. These men were critical and highly esteemed in Jewish culture. They had their hands in the religious, educational, judicial, & governmental aspects of Jewish culture. Particularly in the arena of religion – they had control over interpreting and determining tradition. The point is that these guys were real students of the Law. They went through the full arduous process to be where they were at – educationally, experientially - age wise. They’d put in their time. But, they missed it.

One of the functions of John was to begin a division in Israel. Those that would receive or reject his baptism. This divide would only widen with Jesus. After all, Jesus himself said he came to divide. Matt 10:32-35 "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. 33 "But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. 34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 "For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'." John was the first cut in the cloth that Jesus would later rip in two.

John is like the continental divide. On whatever side waterfalls on the continental divide determines whether that water will shed and end up in the Gulf of Mexico or in the Pacific Ocean. Those end locations are very far apart and so too rejection or reception of John leads to very different destinations in relation to the salvific purpose of God.

When it says “John’s baptism” that really stands as a summary of John’s ministry. To refuse his baptism is tantamount to rejecting his message of repentance and preparation for the Messiah. It was a clear indication of repenting and turning one’s heart to God’s purposes. Let me just slip this in here. Maybe you profess Christ here today but refuse to submit to the only acceptable baptism (believer’s baptism by immersion). Your refusal is a clear indication of a lack of repentance.

There are no excuses. Fear, embarrassment – none of these excuses are valid. Repent and submit to God’s purposes.

The religious leaders refused to submit. They were too proud, too good for that. You think I’m harsh, recall John’s view on it? Back in Luke chapter 3 he said to refuse his baptism of repentance was indicative that a person was not a child of Abraham but offspring of poisonous snakes (Luke 3:7). These are no small potatoes here – to reject John’s baptism. It’s to reject the very grand salvific plan of God.

So, think of Luke’s parenthetical comments in verses 29-30 as pushing the pause button to give explanation. It’s kind of like when you might be watching a movie with a friend or family member. And maybe they haven’t seen it before or came in after it started and missed a portion. And so you hit the pause button and say, “Ok, let me explain to you what’s going on here. This is why what the actor just said is so important.” That’s kind of what Luke is doing here. He is hitting the pause button on the remote control right in the middle of Jesus’ comments. Luke is saying, “Ok. Let’s just stop right here for a second with what Jesus is saying and understand the significance of what he is saying.” “He’s saying ‘John prepared the way for me the Messiah and

thus the very plan of God.” So Luke is inserting, “You people reading this better not miss the huge implications of rejecting Jesus.” Luke the evangelist here is saying, “Choose this day who you will serve. Okay, back to what Jesus is saying.” So in verses 31-35 Luke is hitting the play button on the remote. Luke’s inserted appeal is forcing us to pause and ask ourselves, “Where am I at in relation to what Jesus is saying?” “Am I one justifying God?” That is “Am I declaring God just in his purpose?” “Am I giving my verdict of approval on the way in which God is going about it all?” It’s not that it matters what we think. God is God and does that which gives him pleasure and glory. But, the verdict we give on His mysterious ways reveals something about us.

Again, a common theme in Luke is brought to the surface. It is the common person, the ostracized, and the sinful that embrace God’s way - the way Jesus presents. It is “the [common] people” who embrace Christ. They went out into the desert to submit to John’s baptism. They followed Jesus around the countryside. They were poor monetarily, but more importantly they were poor in spirit and accepted the ways of God. They didn’t demand as the religious leaders to have God’s ways pre-packaged, as they desired. No. They were convicted of their sin and acknowledged their unworthiness.

They knew they deserved God’s wrathful condemnation and needed to repent. Do you? But more than that just the common folk, but also the extremely sinful folk - the “publicans/tax collectors” type of people embraced God’s purpose.

Remember the tax collectors were hated by Jews. They were traitors - aiding and abetting the Romans. They were crooks, scumbags who’d stab their Jewish brothers in the back to make a buck - unconscionable. And again, this highlights the kind of people Jesus comes for. He comes for the dirtiest of dirty sinners. But in contrast, it was not so with the religious leaders. They considered themselves clean. They thought they kept the law, not perfectly, but sufficiently and certainly better than everyone else. That’s still the mark of a Pharisee today. The Pharisee inwardly knows he’s not perfect, but he’s surely better and more spiritual than everyone else. They were spiritually refined (with all their good works). And thus they refrained from the base idea of humbling themselves in John’s baptism. They were beyond needing to repent and needing forgiveness. No. In the end, like so many today claim, they believed God would look at their works and judge their good outweighs their bad. John’s redneck preaching on repentance was uncouth and extremist and they didn’t have time for it.

After Luke’s parenthetical commentary, the text resumes with Jesus speaking and he gives a parable. The Pharisees and Lawyers rejected John and by extension Jesus. Jesus in verses 31-35 Jesus expands on this rejection by rebuking those that would partake in this rejection. Jesus says in verses 31-32, “31 And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? 32 They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.”

The people who reject Jesus as spoken of in this parable are not the same people as those who receive him in verse 29. The people spoken of here are the religious leaders of verse 30. They are likened to fickle, bratty children who want their friends to play their games and when their friends don’t play their games they get upset. Children in that day would come with their parents to the marketplace. And kids being kids would play children’s games to pass the time. And in these games they, like kids today, would pretend to be grownups. So one adult game would be the wedding game. Another would be the funeral game. And it seems that Jesus is quoting a couplet that children in that day would say as they played.

The parabolic children play music on their flute but friends aren’t dancing like they want them to. Then the children sing a funeral dirge song, but their friends aren’t crying like they want them to. Here’s the parallel. The religious leaders are playing the notes of religion. But, neither John nor Jesus is responding to their religious game like they want. So they sulk. The brats get mad. Like kids on the playground when mad they criticize and taunt Jesus and John.

They didn’t like John because he was too ascetic (out in the desert, eating locusts etc.). The religious leaders were mad at John because he wouldn’t be merry when they wanted him to be. Their criticism was exaggerated.

They said his asceticism was demonically driven. And they didn't like Jesus because he was too libertine (enjoyed life too much). They got mad at Jesus because he wouldn't be gloomy when they wanted him to be. This was an exaggeration too. They said Jesus' normal eating and drinking was gluttony and drunkenness. The point is: you can't please these fickle, bratty religious leaders. Why? Because it's not a matter of style (being ascetic like John or libertine like Jesus). The problem these religious people had with John and Jesus wasn't their style. It was their same message.

Verse 33: "For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil." John was an ascetic. He didn't eat bread. He ate locusts and wild honey. He didn't drink wine. He drank water. Now, in a way you'd think these religious guys would like John, because weren't they hyper-religious like this too? Instead, they're accusing John of having a demon in him. Why? Because his message was too much for them. His was a piercing message of repentance.

Verse 34: "The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber [drunkard], a friend of publicans [tax collectors] and sinners!" Jesus is on the opposite extreme stylistically from John. Jesus enjoyed good meals and hung out with wrong people. "Sinners", by the way, is a general term for spiritual outcasts, reprobates, including tax collectors, criminals and prostitutes and all other sinners. And these are the people that are open to the Gospel. Are you open to the Gospel? Then you'll need to see yourself as sinful as they, because in reality you are.

Verse 35: "But wisdom is justified [proved right, vindicated] by all her children." The religious leaders rejected both John and Jesus for different reasons. But, those that are "full of wisdom" will not be turned off by John or Jesus. But instead, "children of wisdom" will declare God's way through John and Jesus as just, righteous. They refrain from going down the foolish path of religious leaders who are critical people. People that can't be pleased. But instead, they see and rejoice in the wisdom of God in using different types of people, different personalities and styles in John and Jesus to accomplish the purposes of God.

It seems that part of the reason the religious leaders can't be pleased is because neither John nor Jesus are stroking their egos, telling them how wonderful & religious they are. So, what did they do? They criticized. You show me a critical person and I'll show you a very religious person and that's not a compliment. They'll say to you if you are a Gospel saturated person: "You're too much like John the Baptist, lighten up." Or, "You're too much like Jesus, you need to get serious." Your church is too emotional. Your church is too dry. It is too accepting. It is too judgmental. The pastor's teaching is this way and wrong or that way and wrong. The point is: religious people like childish brats want God to dance to their tune and when he doesn't they get mad. They will criticize on points of style, rather than listening to and submitting to the substance. They focus on the methodology and as a result miss the message of the Gospel. Why? Because they want a small salvation. Small enough that their small works of righteousness fill it. True salvation though comes to the children of wisdom who see, submit to and rejoice in God's wisdom in salvation. They don't sing a dirge song and ask God to cry to it, but they're the one's crying in repentance over their sin. They do not play music and ask God to dance it, but they are the one's dancing with joy over God's free grace.

II. So What? What do we learn from this passage?

What do religious brats look like now?

A. Religious brats are religiously smart and it makes them relationally stupid.

The religious leaders were well educated. They were refined. They were important people. But, their supposed smarts regarding God lead them to their rejection of God's plan. They missed it. Do you know better than God, know better than his plan?

This takes a lot of different forms but it boils down to this. You're religiously smart if you think the way you get in good with God is through be a moral, decent, and good person. Your good outweighs your bad. The idea is if you try hard enough and are good enough that will please God. You want to justify yourself (declare yourself and your plan as just) instead of God and His plan as Just. The problem with the works-righteousness approach is that's not God's plan. His plan is for a restored relationship between you and Him, but not through your own efforts. But rather, through the efforts of someone else. That someone else being Jesus Christ - the Savior, Substitute for you.

God's plan is so easy and so hard at the same time. It's so easy in that none of it is based on your efforts, your goodness – easy. But it's so hard in that the religionist in us doesn't want to admit we need the help, the substitute. We're all spiritual blue collar in our thinking. I can make it happen on my own hard work - thank you very much. I can pull myself up by my spiritual bootstraps. Are you religiously smart but relationally stupid? Relational smartness only comes when you admit how spiritual stupid you really are. A close cousin is...

B. Religious brats think they're in sync with God's plan because they perceive themselves holier than others.

A contributing factor to the religious leaders rejecting John and Jesus was the people which attached themselves to John and Jesus. Tax collectors were flocking to Jesus Christ and John the Baptist. Religious leaders thought, "God can't be in this." Certainly God wouldn't identify Himself with those kind of people.

Primarily in context, the religious brats were talking about in this passage are unbelievers. They are religious and unsaved. However, even once a person is converted and becomes a Christian there is still the religionist/the legalist in everyone of us. The old flesh wants to rear it's ugly head again and again frequently. It feels like all the time. Examine yourself if you are a professing Christian. I say professing because perhaps you're religiosity is actually keeping you from Christ. Examine yourself. If someone doesn't dress like you or express himself in your same way, do you think you're a notch above him or her? Honestly, you might not ever say it out loud, but honestly you think you're a notch above them. You might be a Christian indeed. In fact, you might be a godly person in many areas and a good influence. But, there are elements of unbelief in your heart concerning the implications of God's free grace. You really don't see all believers in Jesus as equally justified. The key word there being "equally." You might be a believer, but you still want a little credit for how righteous you are. And that you're more righteous than other Christians who don't quit think just like you – "they're worldly." "Worldly" can often being used as a nice, broad and convenient label. It can become code for – "they don't see a gray area black and white like I do." And why do you see it in such black and white terms? Because that's the mechanism that gives you leverage over them – that "I'm holier than they." God is more pleased with me than them.

And usually, those Christians over there are considered worldly based on your external evaluation. Listen. There is such a thing as worldly Christians. But, the evaluation has to start in regards to the heart - the internal not the external. There are worldly Christians and they are often the most religious. They are often the one's with the highest standards and scruples. They are often the ones in a Bible-believing, conservative church like ours who have all the externals nailed down, but because their passion is for those external standards instead of Jesus Christ they are worldly. They are passionate about religion, not about Jesus and they are worldly. Talk to them sometime. They will be very zealous in their speech about this standard or that standard that all the "worldly Christians" aren't adhering too. But you start talking to them in a real, authentic and meaningful way about Jesus they won't have much to say – not with real heart felt love for Christ. That's because it is about religion for them and not a relationship with Christ.

The truth of the matter may be that these supposed “worldly Christians” may have a heart is ablaze for Christ and the things of God. And that makes it even more annoying to you as a religionist. You think, “That tax collector type of worldly Christian seems to love Christ at a depth I don’t, but they’re just all emotional and certainly God can’t be as pleased with them as me – just look at them.” So yes, you’ll admit if they are a believer they have the same blood of Jesus covering them. But, if the truth be known you feel, “When God looks my way his heart experiences a little more joy while His heart is grieved when He looks at “Joe lesser Christian, Joe worldly Christian.” The problem with this is the focus is all on my righteousness and the lack of righteousness of other Christians instead of the focus being on the righteousness of Christ alone and glorying in Him alone.

C. Religious brats focus on external rituals because then they don’t have to really examine themselves inwardly.

The religious leaders were around religious rituals and observances all the time. They got to the point that another ritual like John’s baptism was just that - a ritual. They weren’t thinking deeply and with contrition about the message of the ritual. They weren’t probing their hearts. “Am I in need of repentance?” Everything was dealt with at arms length.

Millions of people today like yourself will be sitting in pews as you are right now. And like those 1st century religious leaders they will only think very shallow in regard to their own sin. Do you see the ironic twist in this passage? The religious leaders had the externals nailed down but that actually prevented them from searching themselves inwardly in a meaningful way. They were myopic in regards to their sin. But, the common people, even horrible sinners like tax collectors who weren’t advanced in external religion were masterful in probing themselves inwardly to the point that they repented. See the irony? The really religious guy was incapable of thinking deeply about sin, but the irreligious guy (the tax collector sort of sinner) did think deeply about his sin. John Owen (a puritan and arguably the greatest English theologian) said, “He that hath slight thoughts of sin never had great thoughts of God.”¹ In other words, if you think small of your sin you will think small of God. Think big about your sin you will think big about God.

D. Religious brats are so familiar with spiritual matters that it breeds contempt.

C.S. Lewis once wrote to a friend of his: “Someone has said, ‘None are so unholy as those whose hands are cauterized with holy things;’ sacred things may become profane by becoming matters of the job....I’ve always been glad myself that Theology is not the thing I earn my living by.”²

The religious leaders were professionals in the God business. They could recite the observances in their sleep.

Their frequent familiarity calloused them. But, you don’t have to be a religious practitioner or scholar for spiritual familiarity to deaden your soul. Certainly, the answer isn’t for you to ignore spiritual matters but to guard your heart. To frequently ask yourself questions like, “Ok. I’m singing this hymn but is my heart engaged with the Lord or am I going thru the motions?” The solution isn’t to stop singing. The solution is to ask the Lord to forgive you for your coldness and ask for your emotions to catch up with your practice. To ask, “Lord, I’m citing this verse in Sunday School, but as my lips move is my heart penetrated by its truth?” To ask, “Lord, I read my Bible and pray daily but is transformation really going on in my soul and mind?” To ask, “Lord, I listen to sermons respectfully but does my mind wander on to other matters in life? Or, Lord I listen, but am I constantly applying it to others or to myself?” Let us understand, that as we would think ill about others we feel are pharisaical we ourselves can become Pharisees.

¹Carson, D.A. *Letters Along the Way, a Novel of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993, 16).

²Vanauken, Sheldon *A Severe Mystrey* (San Fransico: Harper & Row, 1977, 104-05).

E. Religious brats get mad at Christ-centered people don't play their religious games.

A fruit of unbelieving brats getting mad at those that are truly Christ-centered is they exaggerate and lie about them. They said John is a demon possessed prophet and Jesus is a drunk and glutton and isn't a separatist. Religious people get so mad because their meaningfulness and identity is all wrapped up in others recognizing how moral and good they are. So, when a person who is wrapped up in Christ instead of being religious like them (wrapped up in externals) they exaggerate about that truly Christ-centered person. They have to lie about them because they feel threatened by them. They sense that the Christ-centered person has the real thing and they don't and it eats at them. They've got to tear down that person. They can't tolerate someone tarnishing their image as the religious guy - the guy who has it all together spiritually.

Unbelieving brats express their anger at Christ-centered people by pointing out stylistic differences. This is a difference between them and truly Spirit-filled, Christ-centered believers who recognize God uses different styles and personalities. God is not confined to our little traditions, movement, circle, or school. But unbelieving brats think when someone doesn't fit their profile of a godly person, "That person certainly can't be of God, because they have the wrong style in _____." Whatever - name the pet external. Also, usually religious people determine these stylistic differences are wrong because their movement's guru (their favorite Christian college president) has told them it is wrong. Usually religious people can't think for themselves. They've drunk too deeply of the Kool-Aid which their little protestant pope has given them.

That's what these 1st century religious leaders were all about. They'd study the traditions. They'd drink the religious kool-aid and then parrot the extra-biblical logic of their leaders. And today they'll vent, "That style is worldly. And on they go with their drivel that ignores the true message of Scripture and replaces it with externalistic and stylistic driven reasoning." They're more concerned with style and externals than the message and the heart of the messenger.

F. Religious brats will never be satisfied with, but always criticize Christ-centered people.

You're going to have to choose whether you're going to be a religionist and critical person – always nit picking over stylistic issues or whether you're going to be a Christ-centered, gospel-driven person. If you, as a child of wisdom and living according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you'll be criticized and persecuted. In Matthew 10 when Jesus sent out the 12 apostles he said this to them: "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues" (Matthew 10:16-17, ESV)

Did you hear that? "Flogged in synagogues." That means very religious people in religious places will persecute those that are Christ-centered. And I'd argue that is where the most severe type of persecution continues today. It happens in Bible believing, Bible-preaching conservative Baptist churches. Oh yes, the religious rules and scruples are different today. But, the game is the same. If someone isn't exactly lining up with the man-made stylistic rules (not clear from Scripture) the most religious people will persecute, in attitudes or actions or words. And I'm just saying that if you are going to center your life on Christ's goodness and obedience rather than your own goodness the religious people in churches like ours will persecute you.

Jesus also said in Matthew 10, "22And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. 24 The disciple is not above *his* master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *shall they call* them of his household? (22, 24, 25). Jesus said they call me name and they'll call you names. In Luke, Jesus

was scorned as a “glutton & drunk.” And you know what? If the major thing to you is Jesus and His Gospel and minor things are that – minor, you’ll be labeled. They’ll label you theologically. They’ll label your practices, “He’s a compromiser you know.” Or, “She doesn’t hold this particular standard or some other religious scruple.” Or, “He doesn’t adhere to the same style in this area of the Christian life or that area.” Folks, this is how it has always been and always will be.

And so, here’s the point: if you’re going to be gospel-driven, you’re going to have to come to grips with the reality that you’ll never satisfy the religious crowd because you aren’t playing their childish, bratty religious game. You’ll never win at their game. Their game is ultimately always designed so they win. That they’re crowd champion of what it is to be spiritual. Just keep moving ahead with your Lord. Let them call you the tax collector, glutton or compromiser or whatever.

You just keep resting in the righteousness of Christ that clothes you. That’s true holiness. Resting in Him, not resting in your standards (that’s counterfeit holiness). Rest in Christ, but know this. As you do, you’ll never please and satisfy religious people. You see, they’ll attack the style (the supposed compromise) but their real animosity is with the message. The message that we must rest our sinful selves in Christ and not in our outward righteousness - that’s what they hate.

They’ll criticize you individually and if we’re the church we should be they’ll say cutting remarks about us corporately. “You know that Calvary Baptist Church, they’re a bunch of _____” - fill in the blank with whatever pejorative label that the religionist will slap on us. “They’re too serious like John – too separatist.” Or, “they’re too loopy, goosy like Jesus – not separatist enough. They’ve lost the ‘old time religion’ you know.” Well, so be it. The best thing we could do is to lose all religion - that we might gain and have Christ alone!

This passage is calling on us for a response. To ask: where do I stand? What do I think of the Gospel which John the Baptist and Jesus declared? Is this the true message? Which side will I go on? Religion’s side or the side of God’s wisdom? Will I be a childish brat and demand God play my game by my rules? Run the universe and my life how my religion dictates? Or humble myself to his plan of salvation and living out his plan of salvation as a Christian? Because here’s the reality we don’t like to admit but is critical to admit. There’s a Pharisee in everyone of us, even once we’re converted. And we’ve got to continually beg God to root out the weeds of religion in us that the Gospel would grow out of us.

Here in a moment we’re going to sing “Jesus what a Friend of sinners!” The Religious leaders accused Jesus of being one who was too close to the wrong kind of people. Do you relish that fact? That you are a sinner, but at the same time you are a friend of Jesus? This is the only way you can be a friend of Jesus – admit that you are a sinner.