

How A Sinner is Justified with God

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If you'll turn with me this morning to our text, our text will be found in the Gospel according to Luke 18:14. These are the words of Christ that you'll see are in red.

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Let us pray.

Dear heavenly Father, how glorious thou art. I thank thee, O Lord, for thy great grace, thy great mercies that attend us each day. Thank you, O Lord, for bringing me and my family home safely, for bringing Paul Stanley home safely, all of those who have been traveling. Lord, I thank you that you have brought us back to this place, Lord, and we pray that you, this morning, will join our hearts in a singleness of mind and that mind, Lord, may it be the mind of thy dear Son. May you humble us in this hour that we may see thee high and lifted up, that we would hear your voice, that Lord, we'd hear from you and know, Lord, our calling and know, Lord, our election, and know, Lord, our eternal security that is in thee. O Lord, may you be glorified. May you be exalted. For this I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Luke 18:14, Jesus says, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." I think if I took a poll of everyone in the room, I think we would all desire to go to our home today justified; that as we go and we get in our vehicles and we go from this place and we go to our place of refuge in our homes, that our desire would be that we are justified, but how? Bildad asked Job the same question in Job 25:4, he said, "How then can man be justified with God?" How can a man be justified with God? I tell you, you look at all of the headlines and you look at everything going on in this nation today and you look what goes on among us and it seems like that's the only thing that's important is that everybody is justified in their own eyes. That's how the book of Judges ended, is that everyone did what was right in their own eyes. As we come to this parable and as we're brought to this parable today, Jesus tells us something about being justified. He tells us something very important that we cannot be justified in anything in ourselves, anything that we have done, and that justification must come from

another, from an outside source, from a source greater than anything that's in us, that's in our nature, I should say.

I think, I had a lot of time to think this week, had a lot of blessed times of just looking into the ocean and feeling the breeze in my face, taking inventory as the Lord has been gracious to give me another year on earth, and this past week celebrating that, a time to think about what truly is important and what the Lord has made important, and I mean truly. There are times you go away like that and you think about how things are or when you're on vacation, how good they are, and there are times you think you never want to go back to the life that you have and that's easy because then you're justified by things, you're justified by happy feelings or happy thoughts, and justify simply means to be made righteous, to be made right, to be made whole, and as I said, I think all of us would desire to have that today but how to achieve that, how that is achieved is the biggest question. In this parable that Jesus shares and teaches, there's a struggle going on and the people of God understand it and they could recognize it as the Lord brings it to them because they see that struggle in themselves, the Pharisaical fallen nature that desires to come and be accepted by God by his own merit and the things that he's done for God, and you may sit there today in your piety and your high righteousness and think that that's not in you, that that's not in your thoughts, but it truly is. It's always going to be in our fallen nature, is to stand and to take inventory in ourselves to see how we're righteous or what we've done to be righteous.

I find it a lot more in my life as I'm older than when I was younger. I didn't care that much about those things but as I get older in my life and I survey my children and I survey what God has given me in my life, and that tendency in the old nature is always to creep up to say, "What have you done for God? What have you done at this point in your life? What have you done? Have you been a faithful servant unto the Lord? Have you done this? Have you done that? Have you cried out to God? Have you prayed more? Do you go to church? Is your mind constantly caught up with the Lord?" And we have one that's pictured for us that way today and we won't find any fault with him on the carnal level and we never find any fault in ourselves on the carnal level. It's easy. It's easy to look out at others, it's easy to judge others, but when it comes to self, that righteousness that we spin and that righteousness that we seek to be justified in in the old nature is our own righteousness but praise be to God, there is a warfare and there is a righteousness that Jesus will explain today that we must be justified by and it's not a righteousness that lies in the old nature, it's not a righteousness that lies in us, it's a righteousness that must be imputed. It's a righteousness that comes by Christ, it's another's righteousness.

Hold your finger here and our first journey today is in Romans 3. If you'll go with me there, Paul explains how this righteousness in justification comes and we'll begin in verse 23, "For all have sinned." All have sinned. It does not matter if you say you have no sin. The word of God says that all have sinned and the word of God also says that the soul that has sinned shall surely die. We have "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." You will see the difference of the two natures displayed by Christ today or the two people, if you will, the two natures. There is one difference and that is when grace works, when Christ is revealed in the soul, the sinner is self-condemned. Self-condemned, not

self-righteous. Self-condemned. He condemns himself. He has judged himself to be unworthy. He has judged himself, he can't even look up to God who is holy and just. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. That is the work of the Lord in our souls.

Paul said we "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace." We are pronounced not guilty. We are first pronounced guilty by the work of the Holy Ghost and then the same work of the Holy Ghost is to show us that we are not guilty in Christ. Christ alone, we're not guilty. Not in your merit, as you will see today. That's the third verse of that song we just sang, it started out that way, "Trusting in my merit, would I seek your face?" The answer is no. You wouldn't. Trusting in your own merit and we see that today in this passage. He seeks God based on what he can bring to God and his co-pilotship, if you will. "Lord, look at what I've done for you." We like to look at our carnal nature and we say, "Oh, that's that nature that follows after the devil and it does wicked things," and that's true but that fallen nature does highly righteous things in our own eyes. In our own eyes. You see, this whole parable that Jesus is teaching is from the viewpoint of God, God's view of righteousness. It's God's view of man and how man can be accepted before him, and it must be in the righteousness of his Son.

"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The redemption that is in Christ. He has bought us back. He has paid the price for our sins and the debt that we have accumulated against a holy and just God. We have been adopted from the line of Adam. If we were not adopted, it would be sure perdition, sure hell, sure damnation, sure condemnation, but this is the greatness of his grace, this is the greatness of his grace and being justified by his grace.

"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." Think about how long-suffering God is toward us creatures who continue to sin, who continue to find and to seek a righteousness of our own. A Cain offering, if you will, to bring to God and say, "Accept this, Lord. Accept what my hands have done. Accept what I've done all my life. Accept what my duty is. Accept what my will is." But the child of God must be stripped of that. By whom? The Justifier.

Verse 26, Paul says, "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness." Paul didn't declare his own. He said there was none righteous, no, not one. "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." We see the righteousness that we're justified with and the faith and both of them originate and come from Christ. That's what "in Christ" means. We're made unto him wisdom and justification and sanctification and righteousness. We are made that in him. In him alone is the only stance that a sinner has before God. "Be merciful, Lord, to me, a sinner." That is our standing. You may not like it, you may be rebelling right now with all of your works and all of your righteousness. That's fine. Only one will go home today justified and that will be the ones who are humbled at the feet of their Savior to see that what he has done is life, what he has done is perfect, and to be in him is where justification is.

We turn back to the parable now and we look at what Jesus starts this parable by saying "he spoke this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves," so I think it's very lawful for me to stand here and tell you this parable goes out to every one of us in this room. We all have a nature that will trust in self. We all desire the work of our hands. We all desire to see things. We all desire to make things happen. If we don't see them, if we don't like the way things are going, we're going to meddle, we're going to get involved, we're going to do what we can for God.

Jesus spoke "this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and they despised others." That's what happens. That's what happens when you're righteous in your own eyes. When your righteousness is all that you see, anger and bitterness toward others is what replaces love. Your desire is to be known and for people to know what you've done, what you say, not the righteousness of Christ, not the forgiveness of Christ, not the remission of sins of Christ.

So Jesus spoke this parable and we have this Pharisaical spirit that lives in all of us and I pray to God today that he put down and he tramples it under his feet. John said, John the Baptist said, "He must increase and I must decrease." John was talking about his own righteousness which Isaiah said, "I've seen my righteousness and it's as filthy rags." It's funny when we hear things like that and we see and Paul was revealed he was the chiefest of sinners and we have all those things on record but you won't find that in our vocabulary. You won't. We're too busy, too cumbered and too worried about what's going on in everybody else's life and how am I going to make it more righteous, how am I going to do this, how am I going to do that. Not only that, in ourselves what can I do? Jesus speaks this parable to those who are righteous and they trust in their own selves. I could ask you and I hope the Holy Spirit asks you as you leave this place today, as you're driving home from this place today, what is your justification.

"And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray." Right there we know they're both Jews because they both went up to the temple to pray. And we know that at least just on the surface, that they're coming there with a purpose, they're coming there seeking something.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee." So the Lord uses one on the top of the food chain and the religious world who was righteous in his own eyes and did everything seemingly for God and then he used a publican, a Jew. A Jew that exacted taxes on other Jews. A Jew that sat at a table, the table of Rome, and collected money from fellow Jews. They were despised as the scourge of society. How could you sell out to that kind of position? So the Lord uses one highly righteous and one looked at that has no righteousness in the sight of man and isn't that what plagues us with being justified? We care so much about the sight of man. The sight of man, how will man perceive us.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself." Don't miss that. Our carnal nature prays. Does that shock you? Do you think all of your prayers are holy and just prayers? In

fact, I could tell you every prayer that's authored by you is a Pharisaical prayer. Every prayer that you ever utter out of your mouth that comes from you is this kind of prayer.

"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself," communed with himself. So let's bring in God now. "God, let me tell you what I've done. Let me tell you the merits of why I can stand here before you today, why I can stand in this prayer and I can pray to you in this place of holiness at the temple."

"I thank thee." Well, that's good, isn't it? He gives thankfulness to God. Well, what does he thank the Lord for? He thanks him that he's "not as other men are." O Lord, I thank you that I'm not like that one over there. I'm not like that guy on the street with a sign. I'm not like those people that treat me so mean. I turn on the tv and I see people shouting and screaming against the government, Lord, I thank you I'm not like them. I look at people and how mean they treat one another and, God, I thank you I'm not like them. I look at people murdering people every day and people in hardship and all over this world and I look and I say, thank you, God. I'm glad I'm not like them. I'm not as other men are. You see, I'm different.

Isn't that the thing that gets in our mind sometimes? Well, we're different. We see things different than everybody else does. We're different. But remember, it's not how man or you or I see things. This is the way God explains justification. This is how God explains righteousness.

"I thank you that I am not as other men are, I'm not an extortioner," because that's what that Publican is over there. He exacts tax money on others. He's extorting them. I'm glad I'm not like them. "Or I'm not unjust either. I'm not an adulterer or even as this publican," which he just kind of summed up in everything. An adulterer also being a traitor of the one you love. He's a Jew. He's a traitor of the Jewish nation. Everything that I see I despise in him and I despise but I thank you, Lord, that I'm not like that. Thank you, Lord.

Do you know what? "I fast twice in the week." We're not Jews but I guarantee none of us fast twice in a week. Highly religious duties. Highly religious, just you and prayer, no food, no beverage, no nothing, locked in a room fasting. He does that twice in a week.

He "give tithes of all that he possesses." I give a tenth. I give that letter of the law. I give exactly what I'm supposed to give, Lord. I've done just what the letter says in the book in that great Old Testament Scripture and the laws that you gave. I've tried to do all that I can do.

The Lord warned us about that in Luke 11:39. He said, "the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness." Isn't that what we're hearing here? All we really hear is the outward part of the cup. "This is what I've done for you." We're getting a little hint at the beginning of what's really going on inside as he's judging everyone around him to not be

merely as righteous as he is. That's our fallen nature. That's how strong that fallen nature is. "I don't need anyone else."

"I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." My duty has made me greater than that one over there. What I've done for God has set me apart from that one over there.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:5, "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men." Do you know what we just heard? The wisdom of men. The wisdom of men, seeking God's acceptance based on self. You say, "Well, I don't tell God all my duties. I don't tell him all these things." You know, I wonder how much sometimes we think that when we speak outwardly and we speak to others or we speak or the way we carry ourselves, if we really believe the Lord is watching, if we really believe that that escapes the Lord. How wicked is our heart? How wicked is our heart? I'll show you here in a minute how wicked our heart is. The other one knew.

"I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." But then there's another one. So we have the one standing there and standing and telling God what he's done and now much. You know, I mean, I can't help but make the comment once again on mixed religion: grace and works. Grace and works. Grace and works. "God, do you accept it? Do you accept my works? Do you accept grace and works? Do you accept the mixture of the Gospel and works? Do you accept creature, the creature and what the creature does and what the Lord Jesus Christ has done? Do you accept that, holy and just God?" Because we have one who believes that he does and he's justified in saying it in his eyes. "I'm justified to tell God that you must accept me this way. You must accept this offering."

But then we have another one over off on the side. "And the publican, standing afar off." Why so far? Because he cannot approach a holy and just God because the law tells him he must surely die. He has transgressed God's holy law. He's a sinner. He is one who has been made to feel the agony and the hatred of sin and the shame of sin. Many say the sinner's prayer, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," and there are some in here probably that are sitting there going, "That's all he had to say? There was a lot more the other guy had to say." That's right and we're going to rebel all the way up until the Lord humbles us. That's what he tells us in our passage today shall be abased. The children of God shall be abased. They shall be. They shall be and they shall be exalted also after he humbles them.

"Would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven." I can't even look. I can't even approach this throne. What a difference in deportment. What a difference in God's work and man's work. Do you need another example? I know we are constantly bombarded with how good man is, how good our work must be, but the Scriptures do not paint that picture. Jesus himself does not paint that picture. Paul said it, "Everything I've done is dung. It's waste to me that I might win Christ. Christ is life. I must be justified in another, in another's righteousness. I must wear a robe of another's righteousness and I will if I be in Christ."

"But smote upon his breast," because, you see, that's where the heart is. That's that desperately wicked part, the inner man. You see, there's something going on in this one, he sees the wickedness within. Remember I read that passage a while ago how Jesus upbraided the Pharisees, "You clean the outside of the cup but inside you're full of ravening and wickedness." This one saw, was revealed that he was inside full of ravening and wickedness and he could not even open up his eyes and lift up his head to the heavens and say, "Lord, I'm justified." He couldn't. He couldn't. I know we like to make fun of those people too, don't we? "Don't look at that one over there. That one's quiet and dealing. They don't say much or they're just not bubbly like we are." That's the difference between the Lord's work and your work.

"But smote upon his breast," and what did he say? "God be merciful to me a sinner." He cried out to the Lord to be merciful to him. On what grounds? On what grounds? He's a sinner and do you know what? Jesus came to save sinners and that's what he reveals to his children. He came to save sinners.

Paul wrote, "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee." That's what you just heard, the sighing of the prisoner, the one who's in the bondage of sin, the one who's in the bondage of himself, the one who's crying out for deliverance, "Lord, God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee according to the greatness of thy power, Lord, according to thy power. Do you know what you saw in the first one? Creature. Man. You couldn't help. It was all over the place. "I do this. I do that." Do you know what you see in this? Christ's work. No creature. Humbled to cry out to God for mercy. Nothing else. Undeserving. "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee according to the greatness of thy power. Preserve thou those that are appointed to die," and die we must if we be outside of Christ. But in Christ, there is eternal life. There is life in his Son.

David said in Psalm 103:8, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." His mercy endures forever and that's something he reveals to his children. Notice that, the cry, the prayer authored by the Author and Finisher of his faith, the prayer authored by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, calls out for mercy because the Lord has revealed to this one that he's full of mercy and that he's faithful and just to dispense of that mercy.

Paul said in Hebrews 2:17, "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." That's what he reveals to us at the foot of his cross. "My mercy, my grace has covered the multitude of your sins. My blood has covered your sins. My work and your justification can, will be, shall be only in me, what I've done."

Hold your finger there and turn with me over to 1 Corinthians 6. Verse 9 says, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" The unrighteous, those

unrighteous in their own eyes, that is not a righteousness that God sees and accepts. They will not inherit the kingdom of God.

"Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." You say, "Gosh, that's just preaching against me. That's preaching against my nature." It's true but here comes grace.

"And such were some of you." Your old nature will always be that. "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified." You are washed in the blood of Christ. You are sanctified by the Holy Ghost. You are washed in Christ. "Ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." And there's no other way. That's what Jesus wants us to know in this parable, there's no other way. You must be justified by one greater than you.

That's what our text told us, right? It was, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." He went down justified and I know the religionists, some of them in here might be, "Well, what did he do? What did he do?" We've got churches full of people today running up and down, "This is what I've done. This is what I can do. This is what I will do. This is what I want to do for you." What did he do? The question is: what has the Lord done? And that question is that. Remember Bildad said, "How can a man be justified with God?" Bildad spent his whole life trying to be justified by his religious works. "Job, you were righteous at one time, you're not anymore. How can a man be just with God? You did have it. You prayed for your family, you are a righteous man. How can a man be justified with God?" How? The Lord doesn't leave us without an answer.

"Such were some of you." Such were some of you. I know we like to preach that passage and say, "Oh, that's what you were way back then because now you don't do those things anymore. You're not covetous anymore." That old nature will always be that way. That old nature will always have those sins. Praise be to God of his restraining grace, his preserving grace of his people because what that old nature is capable of, you just heard it, you just read it, and without the grace of God, there go I.

Now turn over to Galatians 2 beginning in verse 16. Verse 16 Paul writes, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ." We have heard that today. We are justified by his blood. We are justified by his righteousness. We are justified by his faith. Do you know what the Bible is trying to tell us? We're justified by Christ and Christ alone. He is the Just and Justifier of all of them that are in him.

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Every work from your flesh is a work of the law. Every work from your old nature is a work of the law and it will never justify you but Christ's work, Christ's work in the soul is what is accepted by the Father.

"But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners," and that's true. That's very true. That's what's happened to this one who is brought to the temple to pray and he's found that he's a sinner. Paul asks, "is therefore Christ the minister of sin?" Do we blame Christ for our position? Do we blame God because sin entered into the world? Do we sit there and blame-shift? No, that's the old nature. That's the old nature. "God forbid." God forbid it ever happening in your mind and in your soul. That's how, we rest in what Christ has done by God forbidding the old nature, God putting down, mortifying, killing the old nature and growing us up into him in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

"For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." Do you see all those "I's"? That's the problem. If I build. If I do.

"For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." That's what Christ has done, he's given us life in himself and that's what all of that bondage is. I'm going to read you in a minute as we close here in a few minutes, I'm going to read you a definition of justified that Robert Hawker wrote. It's beautiful and I think it ties everything together. But to be justified is Christ's work pointing you that you are a sinner and pointing you that you're saved by grace, bringing you to see the realization of sin. I know it's not a popular message, especially not in this country today.

Then we go into verse 20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I." Do you see how he built up to that? "It's not me," Paul said, "I don't live according to the law. I don't live according to my old nature. It should not define me. My old nature should not reign in me. Christ does. I live by the faith of the Son of God," and the religious world will not like that. They ridiculed Job for it. They've ridiculed all of the saints throughout all of history. "What do you mean you're justified by another? What do you mean you don't?" That's right. I'm crucified with Christ. I took part in his crucifixion that because of him, I am dead to the law and I'm dead to sin reigning over me, and I live because I don't live, it's "Christ that lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me," and living otherwise does nothing but frustrate grace and that's what Paul says in 21, "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

I pray today that as we go, as we hear the words of Christ in 14, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased." I love those "shalls" because it always speaks of his power. It's what he'll do. It's what he has done. May the Lord bring us to rest in his finished work, "and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

I promised you that definition, Hawker's definition of justified is "the act of God's free grace whereby he freely pardons the sinner and justifies him in Christ, notwithstanding all his own unworthiness and transgressions, delivering him both from the guilt of sin, the dominion of sin, and the punishment due to sin, accepting him in Christ and thus blessing him in and through the finished salvation of Jesus Christ our Lord." May he bring us all

to go home today justified in him and that he brings us to look for none other than the finished work of Christ. May he work that in our souls for the glory of him.

Dear heavenly Father, add thy power and thy clarity for thy name's sake. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.