

**Ash Wednesday**  
**Matthew Ude**  
**February 26th, 2020**

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

### **to some who trusted in themselves**

Most of Jesus parable are general and are not directed at a particular group. This parable is a little unique in that it is only meant for a certain group of people. So the question is are we part of that group?

The problem is that if anyone says, "I am not part of this group," then they are exalting themselves and looking down on others.

So the best course of action is for us all to start out with the sure and certain knowledge that this parable is for us. We should not even try to figure out who or when or why we do this. But simply accept that I am proud and haughty and do have a sinful nature that wants to think this much of myself and this little of some others.

### **Pharisee**

One of the problems with this parable is that when we hear the word Pharisee in our minds we have a very different picture of that man than the Jews would have. We hear Pharisee and we think, arrogant, proud, bigoted, hypocrite. We really have no problem with the fact that Jesus condemns the Pharisee. We expect it. But this was not the case with a first century Jew. To them a Pharisee was everything that a Jew should be, to them the Pharisee was a shining example of a godly person. And indeed they were.

So in order to really understand this parable we have to replace the word Pharisee with something else. Some like pastor, teacher, elder. The guy who is always in church, who is always courteous, welcoming, warm and loving. The person who teaches Sunday School and always helps out around the church. The one who gives more than ten percent when the church is need. The man who in every way is dedicated to the church and the word of God and the work of the Lord.

Someone like that is whom Jesus is talking about when he talks about the pharisee.

**God, I thank You that I am not like other men-- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess**

None of these things are bad things to do. All of these things are what God wants and beyond. This man doesn't just give ten percent of his crop he even gives ten percent of each herb that bears a leaf. He doesn't just fast once a week but twice.

Everything that the Pharisee thanks God for is something he should be doing. Everything he says I'm glad I am not that is something that he should be avoiding. It is a good thing that he is what he is, it is a good thing that he is on what he is not.

Notice that he is even wise and humble enough to thank God. In thanking God he is recognizing that this is not his doing but Gods.

In this he echoes and acknowledges the same truth that Martin Luther stated: "I cannot by my own reason or strength"

Everything this man does is on the surface correct and right and what he ought to do. Even the implication that he came with boldness before Gods temple.

Again Luther says, "with these words God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true father and we are his true children so that we may ask with boldness as true children ask their true father."

**this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other**

Having down everything right he did not receive forgiveness, and the other man who on the surface did everything wrong did. This is the irony of this parable. The man whom everyone would pick as the one in whom God was pleased received nothing from God and the one whom everyone would assume is nothing in the sight of God, went home justified.

Why did the Pharisee receive nothing? Because of his pride. This leaves us with a problem. If we try to be like the tax collector and humble ourselves we are still being proud. We end up in that same loop we saw at the beginning.

Are we like the tax collector or the Pharisee? We are like both in all the worst ways. We are like the Pharisee in his pride. We are like the tax collector in his sins. So what are we going to do?

We can reduce the problem of the Pharisee a little more make it a bit simpler and that will help us out.

Why did the Pharisee receive nothing? For one reason only. He didn't ask! In his pride he thought he needed nothing from God, that he was righteous in himself, therefore he didn't ask, therefore he didn't receive.

In this also is irony, because the natural assumption of men is that God is more pleased with those who ask nothing from him, but only bring gifts.

But scripture teaches us the opposite. God has no use for anything that we could ever bring Him. All the universe is His. What He wants is not that we bring anything to Him but to shower His gifts on us. And above everything else that we confess our sins and ask for forgiveness so that He can give to us His grace.

The point of the parable is not that we should be like the tax collector in the way that he lived. The point is not that we should be even better than the Pharisee. The point is not even that we should try to figure out which person we are more like.

The point is that one we do not look down on others.

And more importantly two that we learn to bring nothing to God, but that we come before him as beggars, confessing our sins and delighting in the truth that his forgiveness and grace are ours.

The joyful irony of this parable is that I am going to walk out of this church Justified despite the fact that I am more like the Pharisee than the tax collector. The joyful irony is that each and every one of you will walk out of here justified despite your pride and sin.

The irony is that Jesus did not come to save those who deserve it but those who do not.

Amen