

Hubris, Humility and Holiness

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

Two men came to the temple. Two men came to the altar. Two men came to the church. Genesis chapter 4, Luke 18, Markesan 2022, the date, and the setting may be different, but the story is the same. Cain and Able coming to the altar, the pharisee and tax collector coming to the temple, you coming to church. Men come before the Holy God with one of two attitudes hubris or humility, pride or repentance.

In Genesis chapter three, Adam and Eve who had been created perfect and holy fall into sin and in their sin, God approaches them with the promise. God approaches them they don't approach God.

Genesis chapter four now reveals the quintessential question of all human existence. How will humans respond to this Messiah, this promise from God? And how can fallen sinful humans come near to God? Those may sound like two different questions, but they are really one.

God is pleased with Abel's offering. He is not pleased with Cain's. Abel is able to approach God. Cain is not.

The same thing happens with Jacob and Esau. Isaac is the figure of Christ. Isaac stands as a symbol of the same promise that was given to Adam and Eve. After Isaac, the promise, comes Jacob and Esau. God himself declares:

Romans 9:13 ¹³ As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Jacob receives the promise. Esau does not. Jacob sees the vision and is able to approach the throne of God. Esau cannot.

And now here in Luke 18 we have the same story again. Jesus himself comes. The promise is given. How do men react? Two men come to the temple. Two men approach God. One receives the promise, and one does not.

The Irony of the parable is that the pharisee who was so certain that he was a descendant of Jacob does not receive the promise of Jacob. The Pharisee who was so certain that he was not like the murder Cain, takes his place with Cain as one who cannot please God.

The temple is Jesus

Through the prophet Haggai the Lord prophesied:

Haggai 2:7-9 I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. ⁸ 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. ⁹ 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts."

The temple which will be filled with such great glory is Jesus Christ the desire of all nations.

Jesus himself said **"destroy this temple. . . referring to His body."**

The ladder which Jacob saw in his vision leading to the throne of God, that ladder is Jesus.

Two men came to an altar, a temple, a church, but what they were really doing is coming to Jesus.

Coming to Jesus means coming to be cleansed, healed.

Luke 5:31 Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

When the ten lepers came to Jesus to be healed, Jesus sent them to the temple.

These men had been cut off from the congregation of Israel but more importantly from the presences of God, because they were unclean. Jesus came and cleansed them and sent them to the temple. They could now come into the presence of God. And because fellowship with God was restored to them they could take their place again among the people of God, the fellowship of the congregation.

This is what Jesus does He cleanses and heals those who are sick and unclean and restores them to the fellowship of God and one another.

Imagine you go to an emergency room not because you are sick, or your leg is broken but just to brag about how healthy you are. How quickly before the doctors throw you out? They have no time for healthy people but only for the sick and injured.

Jesus has come to heal the sick and to restore to fellowship those who have been cast out, those who come to him must come for healing. Jesus has no time for those who come to brag about how healthy they are.

Cain, Esau and the Pharisee all have the same problem. Cain thought he could buy God's favor with an offering. Esau thought that God's promise was a thing to be bought and sold. He sold the birthright for a bowl of soup and afterwards thought he could buy it back. The Pharisee too thought he had earned God's love with the things he had done.

Luke 18:12 ¹² "I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess."

On the other hand Abel brings the offering as thanks because Christ has cleansed him. Jacob learns to trust God's promise not his own wiles. The tax collector comes to Christ to be cleansed. These men are restored to fellowship. These men receive the promise. These men go home justified by the blood of Christ.

So how do we make sure we are coming before Jesus like the tax collector, Able and Jacob and not like the pharisee? Our text reveals there are three simple verbs which demonstrate the difference between the two.

Stand

Notice how both the pharisee and the tax collector stand "apart." The pharisee stands apart from other people considering himself better than them. The tax collector stands with the sinners apart from God.

Every time you judge others, because you keep your house cleaner than them, because you are a hard worker than them, because you go to church every Sunday and they don't, because you are better with money than them, every time you judge another you are doing as the pharisee did, standing apart from others you think less than yourself.

Certainly, we ought to do these things, work hard, clean our house, take care of our money, but we dare not come before God bragging of these things nor judging others. We dare not use them as reasons to separate ourselves from others. We come before Christ standing with all other sinners as sinners to be cleansed of our sin.

Accept

It is true that you should not judge, nor should others judge you. They also are sinners. But it is also true that God's word does judge you. The pharisees were quick to judge but also quick to get angry when being judged. They were always getting angry when Jesus pointed out that they ought to stand with the sinners and not think themselves better. It is mark of hubris, or pride, when we get angry when God's word or God's messenger points out our sin.

Getting angry at a doctor who points out your sick does no good. Rather than get angry let him heal you. Getting angry at Christ does no good, rather accept His judgement that you are a sinner and accept the healing He came to bring.

ASK

Most important of the three verbs is the final one, ask. Ask God for mercy and you will receive it.

Did you notice that the Pharisee does not ask a single thing from God in that prayer? He is so confident in himself that he does not bother to ask God for a one thing. Because he does not ask, he does not receive. Many are those who see no need for prayer, confident that they can handle everything themselves. Those who do not ask do not receive.

The tax collector knows what he needs, and asks for God's mercy. Those who ask receive. Having asked for mercy he receives mercy and goes to his house "justified." The pharisee even with all his sins and arrogance would still have gone home with God's mercy if he had only asked in repentance. Those who ask receive and those who ask for mercy from God receive double.

Christ has come to heal the sick, to bring mercy to the sinner, to restore those who have been cut off from the fellowship of God. When we come to Christ, we come with nothing pleading for His mercy and we receive from Christ the salvation of our souls.

Glory be to God who has redeemed us and washed us and made us children and heirs of everlasting life.
Amen