

# “Humility: Part 2”

Luke 18:9-14

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on August 27, 2017

## INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Luke 18.
- We are doing a three part series on humility. Today we are looking at humility before God. In this passage, Jesus says that humility is *the* key to being rightly aligned with God.
  - You can see this in verse 14. **READ 14** - *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*
    - To be justified means to be rightly aligned. In all word processing programs you can choose to justify the paragraph, which means that all the words on the left and the right side are perfectly aligned with the margins. Justification is a legal term that means you are rightly aligned with God.
- In a very real sense, the history of the world is the story of how people have sought to be rightly aligned with God. There are at least three ways that people say you can do this.
  - The first is through religion. The various religions of the world say that if you follow their teachings you will be justified before God or the gods.
  - The second way people seek to align themselves with the divine is through spirituality. Douglas Todd, the spirituality writer for the *Vancouver Sun*, writes, “[*although*] *people from the Pacific Northwest are among the least likely on the continent to be active in an institutional religion, we are a very spiritual people. Mark Shibley labels us as ‘secular but spiritual.’*”
    - Aligning oneself with the divine through spirituality is the theme of every poster put up in our coffee shops that invite you to a seminar where you will learn some meditative practice, yoga system, ancient secret, or chanting technique.
  - The third way is through being a good person. The vast majority of people in the Pacific Northwest believe in God. They also believe that as long as you live a good life, then you are rightly aligned with God.
- In this parable Jesus takes the three ways people seek to be justified before God and lumps them together in this one Pharisee. He is a religious man (a leader in the synagogue). He is a spiritual man (he practices fasting). He is a moral man (he doesn’t steal, do evil things, or cheat on his wife).
  - Yet, what is so shocking is that Jesus says he was *not* justified before God. If that is not crazy enough, Jesus says the tax collector, who was neither religious, nor spiritual, nor moral, went home justified.
    - What is going on here? Jesus roots it all in the issues of pride and humility. *For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*
- Jesus’ radical message is this: there are only two ways to seek justification with God.
  - The first way is to try and do it yourself. Religion, spirituality, and moral living are all the same in that they say if you do this or that then you will be rightly aligned with God. Jesus says this is rooted in pride and will fail.

- Jesus' radical message is that we cannot be justified by what we do. He says we can only be justified by what God did. We cannot earn justification. We must receive it in humility.
- So this parable describes the way of pride and the way of humility. Let us check our own hearts this morning to see which way we live. Let us check out hearts to see if we are truly justified before God or not.

## PHARISEES AND TAX COLLECTORS

- Now before we look at the way of pride we need a little background because we do not feel the shock of Jesus' declaration that the tax collector was justified while the Pharisee was not.
  - Let me get you into ancient thinking by helping you to understand just how much you should feel revulsion against this tax collector.
- In those days Rome ruled the western world, which included Israel. Rome was ruthless in its treatment of all who got in its way. For instance, the ancient Roman writer Plutarch tells us that during the war of Spartacus, Roman armies defeated an army of 120,000 men and then crucified 6000 of them along a 200km section of road called the Appian Way. Imagine walking for a whole day or two and seeing nothing but naked men writhing on crosses. The message was clear: do not mess with Rome.
  - Now how do you fund an army big enough to rule the known world? Taxes. Although this man is a Jew, he had purchased the right from Rome to raise money for the Roman army that slaughtered thousands and oppressed his own people.
    - The only modern equivalent I can think of is a Jew in WWII working for the Nazis to collect money from his own people to fund the Nazi war machine. Furthermore, tax collectors were infamous for charging more than required so they could keep it for themselves. This man is a wicked, greedy, and immoral man.
- In contrast the Pharisee is like your local church leader who teaches Sunday school, loves his family, works an honest job, and is regarded by all for his character.
  - And yet Jesus says in verse 14, **READ 14** - *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.* What is going on? Let's examine Jesus' answer by entering into his two descriptions.

## THE WAY OF PRIDE

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** First then, the way of pride. Here Jesus describes the futility of trying to rightly align yourself with God on the basis of what you do.
  - Look at the Pharisee's prayer. **READ 11-12** - *The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'* Now what is wrong with this? Is it wrong to stand? Certainly not. Is it wrong to begin praying by saying, "**God, I thank you.**" Certainly not.
    - But notice he is not really praying to God at all. He is really praying to himself. Notice carefully that the word "**I**" appears five times in this short prayer. **READ 11-12** - *God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'*

- In fact the whole subject of the prayer is himself and specifically how confident he is in what he does.
- Notice that he outlines how good he is by appealing to the fact that **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** he is a good and moral person. **READ 11 - *I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.***
  - He also mentions how faithful he has been in his **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** spiritual practices. He fasts twice a week and is faithful in prayer.
  - And he mentions his **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** religious practices. He gives a tenth of all he gets.
    - Now that is pretty impressive. God had only commanded the Israelites to fast once a year. He fasts twice a week and gives 10% of his gross income away.
- Now what is wrong here? This man has not murdered anyone or cheated on his wife. He is a moral and good man.
  - In short then he believes he is justified before God because of what he does.
    - This is clear from verse 9. **READ 9 - *He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.*** The Pharisee then represents anyone who believes they are rightly aligned with God on the basis of what they do.

## MODERN DAY PHARISAISM

- Right here Jesus is drawing the line in the sand between his message and every other way that human beings seek to justify themselves before God. All other paths make the basis of justification on what you do.
  - Take Islam for example. The Qu’ran teaches that a person’s good works determine if they get into paradise: ***“In the day of judgement they whose balances shall be heavy with good works shall be happy; but they whose balances shall be light, are those who shall lose their souls, and shall remain in hell forever...on that day their deeds shall be weighed with justice. Those whose scales are heavy shall triumph but those who scales are light shall lose their souls.”***<sup>1</sup> It is all based on what you do.
  - It is the same with spirituality. I picked up a pamphlet on the Sufi Meditation Center. The pamphlet states that as we begin to mature spiritually we learn that this world is unreal, ***“that there is another reality – an authentic reality – behind this realm of illusion...which is the only reality that really matters to us...once we reach this level of understanding we begin searching for a doorway through which we can pass out of this realm of delusion into the realm of realities. Sufi Meditation is that doorway.”*** So if you practice Sufi Meditation you will be rightly aligned with the divine.
  - Likewise, if you ask the average person if they believe God accepts them they will answer, ***“Of course, why wouldn’t he? I live a good life.”***
    - So you see **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** religion, spirituality, and being a good person all believe fundamentally the same thing; namely, that we can rightly align ourselves with the Divine by doing certain things.
- But this is exactly what Jesus is speaking against. This Pharisee has surpassed anything you or I could ever do and yet he stands condemned. Let’s be clear though: he is not condemned for doing good things. He is condemned for trusting that his goodness will justify him before God. He says, ***“I obey and therefore I should be accepted by God.”***

---

<sup>1</sup> Sura 23:102-103.

- Why is Jesus so against all of this? In short, because it is all based in pride. If we think our good lives, spiritual practices, or religious observances can justify us before God then we do not believe we need a Saviour. We are saying that we believe we can be our own Saviour.
  - We present God with our resume and say, ***“God, you must accept me because look at this and this and this.”*** We believe God owes us because we are so good. To people who do not believe they need mercy Jesus says, ***“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.”***

## LOOKING DOWN ON OTHERS

- Moreover if you are confident that what you do rightly aligns you with God then you will look down on others whom you deem not to measure up to your self-appointed standards. **READ 9 - He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:**
  - Because he based his identity before God on what he did, the Pharisee was puffed up with pride and therefore looked down on the tax collector. His prayer is dripping with pride - ***“or even like this tax collector.”***
    - You see if you base your acceptance before God on what you do, it will lead to pride. An inflated view of self and will always lead to a deflated view of others. You will become self-centred and arrogant and therefore lack love and humility toward others. But it is all self-deception for you are only great in your own eyes.
- So Jesus overturns all human ideas about how to rightly align with God. He declares that it is futile to try and rightly align yourself with God on the basis of what you do because **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** the three ways are rooted in pride (“I’ve done well and don’t need mercy”) and can easily lead to an inflated view of self that looks down on others.
  - So how can we be justified? Let’s turn to the tax collector.

## THE WAY OF HUMILITY

- **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** In the second place, let’s look at the way of humility. Here Jesus describes the freedom of being rightly aligned with God on the basis of what He did.
  - The tax collector is the opposite of the Pharisee in every way. Notice in verse 13 that the tax collector stands far off. He is not confident that he can draw near to God because he knows He has not earned it.
    - In fact, Jesus says he ***“would not even lift up his eyes to heaven.”*** He does not compare himself to anyone else but only to God. And when he sees the perfection of God he knows that he can never earn God’s favour. All he can do is cry out for mercy.
- And then he does something that is very interesting. He beats his chest. The only other reference to this is Luke 22:48 where Jesus cries out in a loud voice and breathes his last. We then read that ***“all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.”***
  - In his studies of Middle Eastern culture, Kenneth Bailey says that women may do this at funerals but for men to do this suggests extreme sorrow.<sup>2</sup> Women in Middle Eastern culture still do this for instance when they lose a child through an act of terrorism or violence. They strike at their breasts. But men do not do this. One person has said, ***“It***

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes: More Lucan Parables*, 153.

*takes something of the magnitude of Golgotha to invoke this from Middle Eastern men.”<sup>3</sup>*

- And what invokes this response from the tax collector? His heart is revealed in his prayer.  
**READ 13b - ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’**
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** First, this man is humbled because He knows God is holy– which means there is no stain of evil in God’s being.
  - Second, looking at his own heart, this man sees he is stained by sin.
  - Third, he knows he cannot justify himself and so he calls for mercy.
  - Finally, he knows God ability to justify him through sacrifice. Let me explain that.
- In this word ‘mercy’ we find the key to the whole story. This is not the general word for mercy. He is asking for a specific kind of mercy. Listen carefully to this next part: remember that the two men had gone up to the temple to pray. Temple prayers happened at 9:00am and 3:00pm.
  - Every day the ritual was the same. Three things would happen: firstly, the priest would sacrifice an animal on the altar. Secondly, he would light the incense. And then thirdly the people would pray. Why that order? Why the sacrifice first?
    - Sacrifice must precede prayer because guilty sinners are not permitted to come to a holy God. The animal acted as a substitute for the people. Its bloody death symbolized the taking away of the people’s sins. The animal bore the death that sinners deserve for not measuring up to God’s standards. And because we sin so much the blood flowed day after day after day. Priests were professional butchers. Once sin was atoned for, the way to God was opened.
  - Then the incense went up. Incense represents prayer. So once the people saw the incense going into the air they knew the way to God had been opened through the death of the animal and they were now free to pray to Him.
- So, what is the tax collector asking of God? Not mercy in general. He is literally praying, **“Be propitiated to me.”** Propitiation means to turn aside wrath. So he is crying out, **“God I have nothing to offer to justify myself. I deserve judgement. But oh God, may the wrath that is due to me fall upon the animal instead of me. Let that animal’s death be for me. May your justice fall on it instead of me. Apply its death to me. Let it be for me oh God.”**
  - Do you see it then? He knows that he cannot do anything to make up for his guilt. But he knows that God has provided a way for him to be justified. So he turns away from trusting himself and trusts in what God has done for him in the death of the animal.
- And what is Jesus’ response to all of this? His answer stunned his hearers. **READ 14 - I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

## HOW TO BE JUSTIFIED

- So how do you make sure you are rightly aligned with God? According to Jesus, you humble yourself by ceasing to trust in what you do. In humility you look to what God did.
  - And what did God do? In Romans 3 Paul writes that, **“God put [Jesus] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”** Or in John’s words, Jesus is **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”** Jesus offered up his life on the cross. He took our sin upon himself. The wrath of God that was due to us fell upon him instead. His blood was spilled. That is why John also writes that, **“[Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins.”** God accepted his sacrifice for the curtain of the temple was

---

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur.

torn in two. This clearly shows that the way to God has been opened. And now the incense is going up saying, ***“God has accepted Jesus’ sacrifice for sin. The way is now open to God.”***

- This is a call to cry out to God saying, ***“I see now that I cannot earn your favour. I deserve nothing but judgement. But oh God I trust that your judgement fell on Jesus instead of me. Apply his death to me and justify me.”***
- You see this is why genuine Christianity is both hard *and* easy to accept. **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** Genuine Christianity is *hard* for proud people to accept because they choke on the idea that they are not good enough to justify themselves. They choke on the idea that someone must rescue them - that their sins need atoning for and that God must justify them. But this is simply pride. Proud people always find it hard to kneel and admit their faults.
  - But it is also extremely easy to accept. **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** Genuine Christianity is *easy* for humble people to accept because, in their despair at being unable to justify themselves, they rejoice that God freely justifies anyone who asks Jesus for mercy.
    - That is so easy. That is so freeing. This is freedom because you are freed from endlessly trying to earn God’s approval by what you do. If you think living a moral life will earn God’s favour then how will you know when you have attained it? How good is good enough? You will either fall into despair realizing that you cannot attain or become prideful thinking that you have.
      - The good news of Christianity is that God will justify those who trust in Christ’s sacrifice to make them right with God.
- So how do you do this? How do you receive God’s justification? You cry out for mercy. This is well exemplified in the passage immediately following this one. **READ 15-17** - ***Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. <sup>17</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”***
  - So Jesus says the way we receive the kingdom is like little children. So how do children receive things? They simply cry for help and hope that it will come. When a baby is hungry all it can do is cry and hope that someone will answer. When a child it calls for help and hopes someone will answer.
    - This is the only way we are justified before God. We cannot earn it. We simply cry out to God to have mercy because of what Jesus did on our behalf.
- The good news of Christianity is that all those who cry out for Jesus to justify them, receive it. God is a God of grace. ***“And this man went home justified.”*** The question is very simple: who will justify you before God? According to Jesus, if you answer, ***“I can justify myself. I don’t need a Saviour”*** then you stand condemned. But if you say, ***“I am a sinner. I cannot justify myself. Jesus justify me!”*** then God promises to justify you.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 12)** Religion, spirituality, and being a good person say, ***“I can justify myself before God on the basis of what I have done.”*** Genuine Christianity says, ***“I cannot justify myself but God can justify me on the basis of what Jesus did.”*** Who will justify you?
    - Will you humble yourself before God today? **(SHOW SLIDE 13)**