

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Cornerstone

Luke 18:9-14

By Rev. Bernie Michaud, June, 2018

Question: Why did you come here today?

What do you want from God?

What do you need, what do you expect to receive from God today?

I know that if we were perfect, we would not come as needy people; we would come just to sing praises and to worship God.

But, we are just people who are in need, and God cares for us.

Today we are going to be looking at the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

Two men who went to the temple, both for different reasons.

As we look at this parable this evening, I want us to think about why we come to church.

And, more importantly, how we approach God.

Try to see if you identify more with the Pharisee or the Tax Collector.

It's good every now and then just to ask the hard questions and the questions today are:

Why do I come to church; what do I want from God; what do I expect from God today, and, how do I approach God.

Read Luke 18:9-14

Jesus told this parable because there were many who's hearts were not right.

People just seem to get this God thing mixed up.

We too can get things mixed up.

So, the Pharisee came into the temple thinking that he was somebody special.

Even standing before God he thinks himself to be great.

He doesn't confess even one sin but begins by telling God, or himself, just how special he is.

"I'm not like other men; I fast twice a week, I tithe, I'm pretty darn great!"

BTW, according to Lev. 16:20, they were only required to fast once a year.

And he says all of this when there are plenty of people around to hear him.

What is the point of doing good stuff if no one see or hears you?

Next, he compared himself to others; robbers, adulterers and evildoers.

He didn't compare himself to anyone that's good, just the bad people.

Seeing the tax collector on the other side of the room; he told God how much more special he was than this man.

I hear people doing this all the time. They say, "I think I'll go to heaven; I'm not that bad of a person, I don't steal stuff at Walmart or cheat people.

I don't even drink or smoke or chew gum!

Do you ever feel better about yourself when you are around people who are a mess?

This Pharisee didn't realize that the tax collector was going to heaven and that he was on his way to hell.

It's dangerous to be wrong about stuff.

Luke 18:9 says: He also told this parable to some who were confident in their own righteousness and looked down on others.

All of us fall short in many ways and yet God loves us all.

All of us are in need of a savior and God reaches out to us no matter what our sin is.

Now the tax collector on the other hand, cries out to God.

He's ashamed of his sins.

He's ashamed of himself.

He begs for mercy.
His heart is broken and he's sick of being the way that he is.
He needs God's touch on his life.

Do any of you ever come here feeling this way? (I know many who feel this way)

At the end of the parable Jesus says,
Luke 18:14 (RSV) 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

So, both of these men came to the temple for different reasons.

The Pharisee to show how great he was.
He came looking for the praises of man.
The tax collector to beg God for mercy, not caring what any person thought of him.

For me, it's not so important how they came in as to how they went out.

The Pharisee went out being proud, just the way that he came in.
He thought that all that he did and said really impressed everyone including God.

The Tax Collector went out justified by God.
He went out clean, loved and forgiven.

But, I'm not sure that he felt as though he was justified.

I'm not sure that he went away feeling clean, loved or forgiven.

I'm not sure that we always leave here feeling the love that God has for us.

When we come to God thinking that we have no needs we leave without any blessings. (**Repeat**)

On the other hand, when we come to God thinking that we are so wretched that even God couldn't love us, we might leave without knowing that God wants to bless us.

But God loves us; He desires to meet us here today.

He desires to forgive our sins; to clean us and to love us.

I'll ask again, what did you come here for today; how do you approach God?

What do you want, what do you need from God today?

My fear is that both of these men missed out on what God had for them.

My fear is that many of us miss out on what God has for us.

A while back I read the book, Radical, by David Platt.

He tells how a lot of people try to achieve a relationship with God by doing good stuff.

They think if they are special like this Pharisee.

Thinking that not only people, but God, will be impressed with them.

For a few of us who are really good, this might seem possible.

But for the rest of us who know just how wretched we are, we know that we will never make the grade.

We can try and try but we will always come up short.

So we never expect God to really bless us.

Let me read you a little clip from his book.

David writes:

I remember sitting outside a Buddhist temple in Indonesia. Men and women filled the elaborate, colorful temple grounds, where they daily performed their religious rituals. Meanwhile, I was engaged in a conversation with a Buddhist leader and a Muslim leader in this particular community. They were discussing how all of the religions were fundamentally the same and only superficially different. "We may have differences about issues," one of them said, but when it comes down to the essential issues, each of our religions is the same."

I listened for a while, and then they asked me what I thought. I said, "It sounds as though you both picture god (or whatever you call god) at the top of a mountain. It seems as if you believe that we are all at the bottom of the mountain, and I may take one route up the mountain, you may take another, and in the end we will all end up in the same place."

They smiled as I spoke. Happily they replied, "Exactly! You understand!"

Then I leaned in and said, "Now let me ask you a question.

What would you think if I told you that the God at the top of the mountain actually came down to where we are? What would you think if I told you that God doesn't wait for people to find their way to him, but instead he comes to us?"

They thought for a moment and then responded, "That would be great."

I replied, "Let me introduce you to Jesus."

Many of us, like this tax collector, are too broken to climb the mountain to reach God.

We know who we are and as much as we try, we never seem to be able to improve.

We feel as though we don't deserve anything from God and that it would be wrong for us to ask God to bless a person like us.

But today's message is that God sent His Son down from heaven to reach out to this broken tax collector.

He sent His son down from heaven to reach out to me and to you.

He loves us and he wants to bless us today.

How do you approach God?

What do you want from God?

What do you need from God today?

Each of us needs to approach God; we need to come to Him.

It's God's desire that we come to Him and that we leave Him knowing that we are justified.

It's God's desire that we see our sin, our brokenness, our rebellion.

But that we also see Him.

That we see His mercy, His forgiveness.

It's God's desire that we know that His Son came down from heaven that we who are too broken to climb mountains can know Him and receive His forgiveness.

Don't just come to church, come with a purpose.

Come to stand before God.

Come to receive His mercy and forgiveness.

Then leave knowing that you are justified and accepted in His presence.

I'm not sure why you came here but don't leave until you know that God loves you, that He accepts you, that He cares for you and that it is His desire to meet your needs.

God bless you all.