

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
Presbyterian Church

“THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR”

For individual study or group discussion

In *The Pharisee and the Tax Collector*, we find Jesus continuing his instruction on prayer with another parable. Instead of directing this lesson at his disciples, he is cautioning those in his audience “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.” After the *Parable of the Persistent Widow*, where Jesus teaches his disciples to pray and not give up, he then presents the type of posture for whose prayers God will hear in Luke 18:9–14.

The Pharisee's revealing prayer (vv. 9–12)

The Pharisee's revealing prayer should warn us that the way we pray speaks volumes on what we really believe about ourselves and God. New Testament scholar and educator J. Gresham Machen points out the dangers of thinking too highly of ourselves: “No doubt we think we can avoid the Pharisee's error. God was not for him, we say, because he was contemptuous toward the publican; we will be tender to the publican, as Jesus taught us to be, and then God will be for us. It is no doubt a good idea; it is well that we are tender toward the publican. But what is our attitude toward the Pharisee? Alas, we despise him in a truly Pharisaical manner. We go up into the temple to pray; we stand and pray thus with ourselves: ‘God I thank thee that I am not as other men are, proud of my own righteousness, uncharitable toward publicans, or even as this—Pharisee.’”¹

- Read the [Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 23](#). Define righteousness. What is required for a person to be righteous in the eyes of God?
- Read Philippians 3:4–9. Paul had every reason to boast “in the flesh,” but where did he place his hope? Where are you tempted to believe your acceptance by God is based on what you do or don't do?
- What evidence did the Pharisee give for his own righteousness (v. 12)? Read Psalm 14:1–3, Isaiah 64:6–7, and Romans 3:10–12. According to these passages, why can't we boast in ourselves or our law-keeping?

The tax collector's revealing plea (v. 13)

St. Augustine was quoted as saying, “God gives where He finds empty hands.”² And in verse 13, we see the tax collector at the temple, “standing far off” afraid to lift his eyes, let alone his face, toward heaven. Instead he beats his chest and begs for mercy. His revealing plea testifies that he is coming before God empty-handed, “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.”

- Have you imagined God would never love you because of something you did in the past? Read Psalm 51:16–17. How does God's promise of grace and forgiveness encourage repentance?
- Read Philippians 2:6–8. Jesus demonstrated his humility by his obedience. How does obedience to God demonstrate our humility as well?
- The tax collector in Jesus' parable teaches us about the importance of posture, self-denial, and repentance. Read Psalm 18:27, Psalm 25:9, Psalm 147:6, Psalm 149:4, and Proverbs 3:34. What do we learn about the Lord and how he views humility?

Jesus' surprising verdict (v. 14)

Throughout his ministry, Jesus astonishes his listeners by turning their belief systems upside down. Today's passage is no different. His verdict of the publican's justification over and against that of the law-keeping Pharisee underscores the great Pauline doctrine of justification by faith (cf. Romans 3:9–31). Jesus' closing maxim, “whoever exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted” echoes the Old Testament prophets who repeated this truth over and over again to God's people.

- Read Habakkuk 2:4 and Ezekiel 21:26. Using the [Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 33 and scripture proofs](#), define justification. What does it mean for you?

DATE: February 18, 2024

SPEAKER: John Mark/Chad

SERIES: Gospel of Luke

PASSAGE: Luke 18:9–14

Family Dinner Table

Those Who Trust Their Own Righteousness

Theologian R.C. Sproul describes a 1969 survey his church put together in order to gather data for their outreach program, *Evangelism Explosion*. During their survey, they asked the question, “If you were to die tonight and stand before God, and God looked at you and said, ‘Why should I let you into My heaven?’” to hundreds of people as they canvassed neighborhoods. According to Sproul, the participants' answers and attitudes reflected that of the Pharisees “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous” (v. 9): “We tabulated the results of hundreds of people, and 90% of them answered that question with a ‘works righteousness’ answer. Of the people we asked, “If God said to you, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’ What would you say?” 90% of them answered by saying: ‘I tried to live a good life. I went to church every Sunday. I tithed my income. I did this and that. I did this good work and performed that good work.’ They were trusting in their own righteousness.”³

- Read Romans 4:2, 11:6; Ephesians 2:8–10. Why does adding our good works to faith as necessary for salvation deny the gospel?
- If you consider yourself a follower of Jesus, what does being justified by Christ mean for you?
- The Pharisee continued to make a case for his own righteousness in Luke 18:12 “I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” Are there religious rituals you do today in hopes of winning God's favor?

PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

Lakeway Presbyterian Church,
Supported church plant

PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Kim and Michael Essenburg,
supported missionary partners

¹Machen, J. Gresham. *What is Faith?* 1933, NY NY. MacMillan. 80

²Lewis, C.S. *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis, Volume 3*. 2007 NY, NY. Harper Collins. 1555

³Sproul, R.C. *The Pharisee and the Tax Collector*. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/pharisee-and-tax-collector>