

Two Sinners' Prayers

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Preacher: Pastor Dave Thompson

[0:00] Luke chapter 18. We're getting very close to closing out another section in the book of Luke.

! And along the way he visited many towns and cities.

We don't know how long that time was, whether it was weeks or months. It seems like it would have had to have been months that he took traveling from Galilee down to Jerusalem.

And Luke's account, I'm convinced, is not necessarily a chronological account of him traveling from there. I think he even, we've pointed this out, he even through his sharing of that account, brought things in that were shown in other gospels to be early in his ministry or later in his ministry, because he was teaching a lot of things.

But as he left Galilee in chapter 9, verse 51, he set his face to Jerusalem. His purpose was to go to Jerusalem to give his life for his people.

[1:28] And all along the way, he's been teaching his disciples, because the time is short. And it won't be long, but what he has left this earth, ascended back to the right hand of the Father to make intercession for us.

And those 12, and the ones who are already following him that weren't called later apostles, were those he left to carry on his work. And so he didn't have much time, he was teaching them.

But as he was traveling and teaching them, the Pharisees were there also, and they were asking him questions. Some of those questions were stinkers.

Trying to trip up Jesus. And we've seen Jesus be very bold and blunt with the Pharisees. They didn't like him. He wasn't the kind of Messiah they were looking for, and they didn't want to submit to him or follow him or follow his teaching.

It would be easy for a person who's reading through this, who's hearing this message preached, if we weren't careful to think that Jesus has gotten to the point, he's had it, he's fed up with them, and he's written off these Pharisees.

[2:43] But that's not the case. Today's section, I think is just a fabulous expression of love to the kind of people that the Pharisees were.

He stopped and gave them truth. And he did that using the prayers of two sinners.

And so today we'll look at the parable of the tax collector, I'm sorry, the Pharisee and the tax collector. Follow along as I read from Luke chapter 18, verses 9 to 14.

Now, the way it's phrased, he's just continuing. Now, was it immediately after? We're not sure.

But Luke is just giving us the impression that Jesus is continuing his ministry as he does this. He says, He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

[3:49] Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 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. But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

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.

Let's pray together. Father, I thank you for this passage. I thank you for the truths it conveys about human hearts, truths that we need to hear.

I thank you, Father, for what truth it conveys about the heart of Jesus and how we need to hear that. And I pray that you would be with us. Give us ears to hear, and may your spirit take your word and work in our hearts according to our need.

[5:08] And I pray through it all your people would be ministered to, people would be drawn to you, and your name would be exalted and glorified in our midst. In Jesus' name, amen.

So Jesus is on this trek from Galilee down to Jerusalem, and he's going there to die. And he's been teaching people, and as I mentioned, there were people who argued with him, there were people who were listening, there were people who were asking him questions, and, you know, there was all kinds of response.

And as I mentioned also, there could have been this response of, I've had it with these Pharisees. All I'm going to do is blast them. But we find in verse 9, a situation where Jesus responds to the people he sees.

And as he's looking around, of course, he's the God-man. He knows their hearts. He knows what's in the heart of man. And he looked around, and as he looked at the people that were in front of him, he saw in that group of people we don't know what percentage, but he saw in that group of people, in that crowd, some who trusted in themselves and thought they were righteous.

Sounds like a pretty bad group of people trusting in themselves and thought they were righteousness. Now, we, at this point, could assume he's talking about Pharisees, but he doesn't mention.

[6:37] There are times when he points his remarks specifically at Pharisees. Now, he uses a Pharisee in his parable, but he doesn't say, and you Pharisees out there who trust in yourselves that you are righteous.

He doesn't do that. He's looking at the crowd. He's looking at all the people in front of him. And he saw in that group of people those who trusted in themselves and thought they were righteous. Remember that in that crowd, the disciples were there. Lord, have we not given up houses and lands and families for you?

Peter, James, and John kind of made that statement. Amen. There were those who thought they were righteous because of what they had done.

Now, that statement isn't exactly claiming righteousness, but it claimed that their works made them worth something, some sort of reward before God. And so, as Jesus looked out over these people, he sees people who are trusting in themselves, and it isn't just the Pharisees.

[7:57] So, right away, we should not think this message is not for us. He was speaking to his disciples, trusting in themselves and thought they were righteous.

We can be people who say we trust Christ. Now, I'm saying we. I'm not talking about Christians. I'm talking about people who gather in churches. We can be people who say we trust in Christ.

We only say it. We trust in ourselves and think we are righteous. And I want to be careful this morning, and lest I bruise the broken reed or quench the smoking flax, I'm not talking about people who are struggling with assurance of salvation.

This message is not dealing with those who are struggling to know, am I a Christian? There are other things to consider. There are other verses to look at. We're talking about people who want to think they are saved.

They want to think they are saved, but they're doing that based on what they do. Doing that based on the works that they do.

[9:11] They're trying to find favor with God by doing things. Well, in a situation like that, how do you know? How do you know who's doing things and who's trusting God?

Well, many people in this condition know that they're trusting in themselves and they just don't want to admit it. There are a lot of people like that.

They know they're trusting in what they're doing. They know they're trying to work their way to heaven. They know they're trying to make God favorable to them. And so those people should know that, yes, I'm just trying to work my way to heaven.

But we can also tell if people are trusting their own good works by what's coming out of their heart. How do we know what comes out of people's heart?

Jesus shows these people by means of a parable. He tells this parable in verses 10 through 13.

[10:18] As I mentioned, we know it as the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. And he talks about two men going to the temple to pray. It wasn't uncommon for people to go to the temple to pray.

Many people went to the temple to pray. We should not ostracize them or think awful of them because they went to the temple to pray in that day and area.

I mean, many of us come to church to pray. And this is a little different, but these two people went up to the temple to pray. And it was something that people did often.

And Jesus mentions one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. And before we get going, we have a mentality because we've been listening to Jesus preach and we've been hearing some of the things that he says.

And we say, Pharisee, tax collector. Because of what we've heard Jesus talk about them.

[11:24] But they would have said, Pharisee, tax collector. And so, as we approach this parable, I want you to think about this from the other standpoint.

They looked at the Pharisees as being the best and the brightest. Those who most faithfully followed God. And so, these people are not looking at this the way we would.

So we have to think about it in the opposite way. These people were looking at when Jesus said the Pharisee and the tax collector. These people assumed that the Pharisee would come out on top and the tax collector.

If anyone was going to be proven wrong, it would have been the tax collector. And so, Jesus uses this Pharisee's prayer. They, too, go up.

And so, the Pharisee makes this prayer. And this prayer, it just sets us on edge. We just look at it and say, how could anybody pray like this?

[12:26] But it would have been acceptable to them. And they wouldn't have been quick like us to write them off because of the way they prayed. But Jesus uses these two prayers to show what's in these people's heart.

He illustrates it by what comes out their mouth. Luke 6, 45. We've looked at this verse already. A good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of the evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

And so, Jesus is using this parable and he uses these prayers and what comes out of these people's mouths is going to illustrate what's in their heart. And the Pharisee illustrates what's in his heart by boasting in what he's not done, the sins that he's not done.

He says, I've never been an extortioner. I've never built people out of money. I've never pressured them for money. I am not an unjust person.

I deal righteously with people. I deal fairly with people. When I go to the market, you know, if I drop a penny, I see a penny that's on the ground, I don't pick it up and keep it for myself. I assume that it's someone else's.

[13:46] And you know, he's just very righteous and upright in all his dealings. And I'm not an adulterer. I've never been unfaithful to my wife. I've never walked with wandering eyes.

I've just, you know, they had rules, you walk with your eyes down and all this stuff. And I've never been an adulterer. and today, someone like this might say, and I've never killed anybody.

These are the things I have not done. Now, notice, there are a lot of things they don't cover. And they don't address some of the things that Jesus addressed on the Sermon on the Mount where things in the heart are things that are expressions of breaking commandments that would be adultery, that would be being unjust, that would be an extortioner.

But they don't go there because their life can't really support that. So we leave some evidence assigned. And it gets down to the 49-51% rule.

I'm better than other men. I mean, I don't do these things and at least I'm not like this tax collector. And of course, tax collectors had this awful reputation.

[15:09] Were they sinners? Oh, yes, they were sinners. They were liars. They were cheats. They were disloyal to Israel. They were Israelites who were disloyal to Israel.

And they stole and they were just rotten. And so when he says I'm better than this tax collector, you know, people understood that. the Pharisees were considered the most pious people in Jewish society.

They were the ones everybody looked at and said if anybody's going to and literally this is the way they thought if anyone's going to make it to get to heaven it's going to be the Pharisees. They've lived the life.

They expended the energy. And people of that day thought if there's anybody going to be in hell it's going to be the tax collectors. I mean they were just so sinful and rebellious against Jewish society. And then the Pharisee goes on to list works. I'm going to say this. Many of you are familiar with this term maybe from a Catholic upbringing. They did works of super irrigation.

[16 : 21] What's that? Well that's where people do works so well they merit more righteousness than average and beyond what they need. This Pharisee he does works I'll call works of super irrigation.

Well what do you mean? He says I fast twice a week. Now biblically the Old Testament only called for people to fast one time a year.

It was the day of atonement. As the remembrance of their sins were brought up before the whole nation they were to fast in mourning for their sins. But he fasted twice a week.

Nowhere in the Old Testament did it command that anyone fast twice a week. So he says I'm doing good. And then the next work was he gives tithes of all that he got.

Now that doesn't sound bad. But it's not all that he learned. It's all that he got. And we think what he bought and that's not what's going on here.

[17 : 33] This man was so fastidious that he tithed everything that came to him. Not just what he earned. But if he went to the market and bought three cups of wheat he would tithe.

I should have done that in a dividable by ten number. He bought ten cups of wheat. We'll change that illustration. He would tithe one cup of wheat if he bought ten cups of wheat.

Why? Did he earn that? No. He raised his own money and he bought it. He wasn't required to tithe on that but he did.

Why? Well, you know, I don't know how pious that farmer is and he might not have tithed and I don't want to be eating wheat that nobody's tithed on. So I'm just going to do one better than people.

I'm going to tithe on what I buy. And so this work, I'm so righteous. I mean, instead of fasting once a year, I fast twice a week.

[18 : 45] Instead of tithing on what I've raised or what I've earned, I tithe on everything I get. I am so righteous.

God must love me so much. I've done more than what was required of me. My righteousness must be earning favor with God.

Well, Jesus, before he makes any kind of judgment, goes on and talks about the tax collector. And he mentions the tax collector's prayer. And it's interesting.

I didn't put that. I should have. One commentator said, there are 15 words to the Pharisee's prayer. And only six words about the result.

there are six words to the tax collector's prayer. And 15 words about the result. Which I thought was an interesting comparison.

[19 : 52] But anyway, Jesus goes on to this tax collector's prayer. To show that those who see themselves as sinners and in need of mercy and salvation will show it in their lives in what comes out of their mouth.

This man knew he was unworthy. The parable, first thing he says, now, the Pharisee, he walks right into the temple, probably right into the middle of the court of men, standing straight in the middle of the court of men, people around, I don't care, and they did their prayers like this.

And he would lift his hands and his eyes to heaven, nothing wrong with that, that was common practice, even talked about in the Old Testament, so there's nothing wrong with it, but he would lift his hands and his eyes to the Lord in prayer, and there he is.

And the tax collector, who was a Jew, who would have been able to be in that same court, probably was backed up against the back wall of that court, right against the wall that would have made it for where the women could come.

He was in there only because that was where he was supposed to be. He stood afar off. He knew he was a sinner.

[21 : 10] He knew, everyone knew he was a sinner. And he didn't look up to heaven, lest, you know, of course he can't see God's eyes, but lest his eyes meet God, like Peter's eyes met Jesus after he denied the Lord three times.

And Peter responded, having denied the Lord and seen his eyes as the Lord looked at him and he went out and wept bitterly. It affected his life for the rest of his life.

He knew forgiveness and he knew grace, but seeing the Lord's eyes, tax. But this tax collector, he wouldn't dare lift his eyes.

I am not worthy of that kind of thing. So he wouldn't lift his eyes. He didn't lift his hands. He stood there with his head bowed and his eyes closed and he's beating his chest.

He's not Tarzan. That's an old reference. I'm sorry. Only a few of you will get that. He's not proud.

[22:22] He's not showing off. He's not exhibiting his physique. He's showing how mournful he is. How he knows he doesn't deserve what he's asking.

He beats his chest as a sign of sorrow and remorse for his sin. And his prayer shows that he knows he has no hope in himself.

He doesn't list the things he hasn't done. He doesn't compare himself to anyone. God. Well in a sense he does.

We'll get to that in a second. And he doesn't say the things that should make him acceptable to God because he knew there were none.

I'm a sinner. And he calls out to God knowing that only God can help him. God be merciful to me a sinner.

[23:23] He calls out for mercy. He doesn't say God I need some help here. You know I've not been doing so well lately. And you know I don't have a good score with you.

But I'm hoping that when I was a kid and I hadn't done a lot of these things. You'll take those thoughts into consideration and not remember the past 20 years. No he doesn't bring anything. There's nothing he can do. And I mentioned he doesn't compare himself to the Pharisee but he does in one sense. He says he calls himself a sinner.

Now that's a comparison. But he doesn't call himself a sinner. The Greek construction is he says I am the sinner.

He has the same attitude. The apostle Paul had. First Timothy 1.15 Thus the saying is trustworthy and deserves all full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the sinner.

[24:29] The foremost. This tax collector realizes his only hope is God. And he cries out to God not to take account of his works but only to give him mercy.

Not because he does anything good to deserve it but because I am the sinner. I know I am horrible in your eyes.

I know I am detestable in your eyes. And he admits his situation. And so we have seen disgorged from these two men what is really in their heart.

We have seen a man who everybody thinks would certainly be the first one in heaven. Based on what he has said. And we have seen a man who has disgorged thoughts that would make us think he will never make it.

Who would show mercy to a sinner. To a tax collector. Now it's a parable but Jesus makes a declaration.

[25:47] And I want you to remember this is not the high priest making a declaration. This is not Herod making a declaration. This is not your man on the street making the declaration.

This is Jesus the son of God making this declaration. Jesus declares that the tax collector was the one who went home justified.

It's a reversal. As I mentioned we look at this because we've heard what Jesus has said about Pharisees all along. We've seen how conniving they were. We've seen how crooked they were.

We've seen how they've gone against the gospel and a Pharisee was our enemy or is our enemy as we looked at this scripture. But these people didn't see that. These people saw the Pharisees as the people who would possibly make it.

If anyone had hope they would make it. God says no it's not the Pharisee. He's the one who had many sins he hadn't committed committed at least in his own mind.

[27:02] He's the one who'd gone and above and beyond the law at least in his own mind. He was the one that was not wicked like that tax collector at least in his own mind.

He wasn't as righteous as he thought. Isaiah 64 6 says we all become like one who is unclean and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

We all fade like a leaf and all our iniquities like the wind take us away. Jesus is declaring this man has deceived himself.

He will not go to his home justified. Jesus is declaring that justification only comes to those who see themselves as the sinners they are and cry out for mercy.

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted. Jesus is saying here every single one who tries to earn their way to heaven won't make it.

[28:24] by earning their way to heaven. They won't go down to their house justified. No one will be good enough to earn heaven.

And yet here's this hope. Who would have thought a tax collector he is the one who will go down to his home justified, acceptable in God's sight, right in God's eyes.

Jesus wanted people to see that. I'll make more of that in just a second but I want to step back and think about the heart of our Savior in relation to this.

As I mentioned we get this propensity in our minds to write off Pharisees. They're wicked, they're evil, there's no sense appealing to them, there's no sense caring about them, there's no sense putting any effort into a Pharisee, they just love themselves and they're all trying to work their way to heaven.

That's not what Jesus did. And we're going to see this, Jesus is real close to Jerusalem. Jerusalem. And we're going to see it in just a few verses but it's not only here, it's like three or four times as Jesus gets closer to Jerusalem, Jesus stops and takes account of the people in front of him and he has this earnest desire that they would come to know him.

[30 : 02] And this is our Savior making his way to Jerusalem, setting his face in Jerusalem, he knows he's going to suffer at the hands of religious leaders. these people he's talking to, some of them, and he knows that the religious leaders and the rulers of Rome that are in Jerusalem, they're going to take him, arrest him, beat him, and nail him to a cross and mock him as he dies for the sins of the world.

And you would think there would be no mercy, no mercy, no mercy, but yet Jesus as he gets close stops and he looks over the crowd. And as he sees them, he sees in their hearts and he says, there are some here who are trusting in themselves that they're righteous and he knows that they won't go to their home justified.

And so he tells this parable. Later, he weeps over Jerusalem, which was full of people just like this, full of people who would eventually put him to death.

And he poured out his heart through this parable. We would have been quick to condemn. Jesus says, no.

There's still time. You need to see that you cannot trust your works to get to heaven. You cannot make yourself pleasing to God. God, the only person who will go down to his house justified, who will go to his grave justified, is the one who says, I am a sinner.

[31 : 42] I cannot lift my eyes to God. I have nothing to proclaim that makes me right and good in God's eyes. I come and all I can do is beg God for mercy.

And he gives it. He is willing. All who come to him will find him. This is the heart of our Savior.

And every step he takes, those who don't make that decision, who are trying to work their way to heaven, will be part of those that he is still loving and still sharing the gospel to.

Do we? Do we share the gospel with the people that we can't stand anymore? God? He set his face to Jerusalem to die and yet held out mercy to those who were trying to work for him.

Let me ask you this. What is your heart like? What do your prayers, statements, reveal about you?

[32 : 57] are you trying to tell God how righteous you are? Are you trying to tell God the ways you don't sin?

Are you trying to tell God the ways you're better than others? Are you trying to tell God or are you trying to excel at keeping God's laws, hoping he will be pleased with you?

just like these prayers disgorge from the Pharisee what was really going on in his heart. Those kinds of statements, those kinds of thinkings disgorge what's going on in your heart.

and if your heart says, look what I've done God, look what I am not, look how good I am doing, these are all signs that you're trying to exalt yourself.

They're all signs you're trying to earn your way to heaven. And a heart that is like this will be humbled by God. and if you persist until you die, the humbling will be eternal.

[34 : 17] Don't let this opportunity where Jesus is proclaiming to you in love as he sees your heart, as you can see from what comes out of your mouth, who and what you really are.

Don't let this moment go by. He sees you're trying to earn your salvation. He is graciously warning you right now that that won't work.

Now he continued on to Jerusalem in spite of these folks just so he could give his life to pay for the sins of his people. And could be you.

And so he's calling you now to see how he shows mercy to those who admit their sin and cry out for mercy. See our Savior, Christian.

See the wonder of what he's done. See the wonder of his grace. If you don't know Christ today, he's calling for you to turn and trust him.

[35 : 23] Let's pray. Father, I thank you. I thank you that your son came, lived, and left Galilee, and along the way did not forget even those who were against him.

And I thank you that that has been your case with people all along. Father, I remember. I remember trying to be good enough in your eyes.

I remember trying to keep the law so that I could be acceptable to you. Lord, as many of us may remember that or may be practicing that, we pray that you would be with us, that we would see that trying to earn our way to heaven will bring us to be humbled eventually for eternity if we don't turn.

I pray that you would be with us. May we rejoice as Christians in the work of our Savior and how gracious and loving he has been for us.

We pray your blessing in Jesus' name. Amen.