

Luke 18:9-34

Verses 9-14: Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 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. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 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!' 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."

--(9-10) Having exhorted His disciples to persevering and faithful prayer, Jesus now warns those who think their prayers are heard on the basis of their own righteousness.

--Jesus introduces two men into the parable who embody two attitudes.

--The religious leaders, and no doubt some Jews, thought there were two categories: The Righteous and The Rest. Of course, they could only consider themselves righteous in comparison with others—which is not a wise habit (**2 Cor. 10:12**).

--We should all take personal inventory here. It is easy to begin to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. **God, I thank You that I am not anything like the Pharisee of this parable!**

--(11-12) The Pharisee stood **and prayed thus with himself**. . . really more of a self-congratulation than a prayer to God.

--He compares himself to the tax collector and congratulates himself for doing more than the law required in terms of fasting and tithing.

--(13) In contrast, the tax collector stands afar off, cannot even look up, and beats his chest in grief. What is his request? **God, be merciful to me a sinner!**

--Notice, no self-congratulation and no comparison to others.

--**Be merciful**. . . could be translated *be propitious to me a sinner*, or *Let there be atonement for me a sinner*.

--The only other use of the Greek word here (*hilaskomai*) is in **Heb. 2:17: Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in thing pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.**

--The tax collector is praying, in godly sorrow, for unearned and undeserved mercy as a confessed sinner. **To me a sinner** is *To me the sinner*.

--(14) Amazingly, Jesus is telling us who is and who is not right with God.

--One man justified himself before God. One man sought mercy from God.

--Jesus repeats a common spiritual law: **for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**

--Jesus uses the same spiritual law on a few different occasions (**Mt. 23:12; Lk. 14:11**), and the apostles repeat His teaching (**James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5**).

--No one will ever be in good standing with God by standing before Him and pleading their own righteousness in comparison to other human beings. God does not accept “good people” in that sense.

--All hope in any right standing before God begins by looking at ourselves, confessing that we are *the sinner*, and that our sin requires His mercy and atonement.

--From that humble position, the Lord can exalt. Without that humble position, the Lord must resist and put down.

Verses 15-17: *Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him and said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”*

--(15) Wonderfully, this little scene is recorded three times (**Mt. 19:13-15; Mk. 10:13-16**), with each account adding some unique details.

--Luke tells us that parents were specifically bringing *infants* (*brephos*). Luke has specifically used the same Greek word of John the Baptist while still in Elizabeth’s womb (**Lk. 1:41+44**), and of Jesus Himself while lying in the manger (**Lk. 2:12+16**).

--Sadly, the disciples try to stop the baby parade. We don’t know why. Maybe it was the fact that the freedom of coming to Christ had risen to the point of even bringing infants to Him? Maybe they just thought Jesus had too much going as He approached Jerusalem?

--(16) ***But Jesus called to them.*** . . . Jesus intervenes. He will not let them leave with a blessing! In fact, He says the blessing of children is a fitting act in direct harmony with the nature of the kingdom of God: ***for of such is the kingdom of God.***

--Childhood was physically difficult in those days. Historians estimate that 50% of children didn’t live to see age five. Childhood is also difficult in our age. A large percentage don’t make it out of the womb, and those who do are not as in danger of physical death as they are of broken homes, fatherlessness, sexual indoctrination and abuse, etc.

--I believe the unsafe nature of our culture for children is truly Satanic. All these things are out of harmony with the kingdom of God and the heart of the King of Kings. *Parents, get your children to Jesus!*

--(17) The kingdom must be entered with similar simplicity, faith, and unashamed helplessness.

Childlike—not childish.

Verses 18-23: Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'"

And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."

So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

--(18) Now we are introduced to the Rich Young Ruler. This account is also in **Mt. 19:16-22& Mk. 10:17-22**. No doubt it was a very effecting scene. Imagine him running and falling before Jesus!

--Matthew notes the man's youth (**Mt. 19:20**), each note that he was ruler (of the religious leaders or of a synagogue) and very wealthy.

--Seeing and hearing the goodness of Jesus, he is driven to ask Him the way to inherit eternal life. He seems very sincere in all he does. Even in his turning away from Christ.

--(19-20) Jesus responds by immediately challenging his claim of goodness. How good did he really think Jesus was? The only truly good person was God.

--This idea of goodness becomes central to their conversation. That is why Jesus states the commands of the law as the ultimate measuring stick of goodness.

--(21) The Rich Young Ruler claims that from his *bar mitzvah*, the age of his religious accountability, he had kept each command. What is happening here? The "good person" is standing before the One Good God, confused about his own lack despite his perceived "goodness."

--(22) Jesus loved this young, confused, sinner (**Mk. 10:21**). Because He loved Him, He commanded him to surrender his idol, invest in heaven, and follow Him.

--This command is not for all Christians, but it was for this man who believed his own goodness until this moment. In love, Jesus cuts at the cancer in his soul. The only way for him to obey would be through faith and repentance.

--Now he had to actually believe that Jesus was good! Did he?

--(23) Why was he sorrowful? Because he knew that Jesus was right. Because he saw now that he wasn't good. He was covetous and idolatrous.

--If he truly believed in the goodness of Jesus Christ, he would have gladly sold all, rejoiced in heavenly treasure, and eagerly followed.

--Do we believe God is good? Can we submit entire control of our lives to goodness incarnate?

--No man is truly good. Only the goodness of Jesus Christ can make us good.

Verses 24-30: And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?"

But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

Then Peter said, "See, we have left all and followed You."

So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life."

--(24-25) People try to make too much of Jesus' reference to the camel. It was simply a common saying about something that won't work. It was similar to our reference to trying to put a square peg in a round hole.

--Jesus' point was clear. The power of wealth over the corrupt human nature and unsaved soul is incredibly hard to break. *What does this mean for America?*

--Why trust in God when riches can give you security, pleasure, and independence? Why hope in a world to come when it is hard to imagine a world better than this one? Why follow Jesus, a poor and rejected Messiah, when riches can win so much favor?

--It may be nice to have some religion with riches—if convenient—but nobody wants the kingdom of God instead of riches—as true riches. *Is our relationship to God what we hold as supremely valuable?*

--I also think it is important to see that Jesus didn't change His message because it made someone who was very likeable, sincere, and influential walk away sad. Jesus loves men and women, but He doubles down on the truth as the man is leaving. **You cannot serve God and mammon.**

--(26) Is this stern message surprising to us? Well, it was much more shocking to the crowd listening to Jesus! They believe worldly success and material wealth was a sign of divine acceptance (Strange how this is still such a powerful lie in the health and wealth gospel of our day and age!). In fact, they were so convinced, that they couldn't imagine someone being saved then.

--(27) Only God can break the powerful hold of any sin in our lives, especially the enchantment of worldly riches.

--This is a good place for our faith to settle when a spiritual truth seems beyond us. We should repeat this phrase to ourselves.

--(28) Some think Peter is being prideful here. I don't think so. Jesus was never afraid to rebuke any of His disciples when necessary. Also, Peter doesn't say this is what *I did*, but says **we have left all and followed You.**

--I think it is simply dawning on Peter, as he watches the Rich Young Ruler walk away despondent, having turned his back on Jesus, that they had not made the same mistake. *All save Judas, who ironically enough, was stealing from the money bag and would literally sell Jesus out for silver.*

--One of the greatest things we can say about these disciples is that they had been willing to change their whole lives to follow Jesus. They gave up family, friends, culture, careers, etc., when Jesus met them and said, *Follow Me*.

--**(29-30) Assuredly, I say to you.** . . gives a serious surety to this promise. This was no rebuke, it was an encouragement and promise to those following Jesus on the narrow path leading to everlasting life!

--**there is no one.** . . Also, gives the promise a wide application. Jesus wants to make sure that everyone and anyone following Him knows this is also for them, and not just for the twelve.

--Jesus promises a recompense both now and in eternity for those that sacrifice anything **for the sake of the kingdom of God.**

--Disciples give up time at home, familial relationships, material goods or lands, etc., because they must be surrendered to follow Jesus. There are times where we cannot have both.

--Certainly, there is proportion in this. We know that Peter later traveled and did ministry with his wife (**1 Cor. 9:5**). But he also spent quite a bit of time from home over three years of following Jesus. Do you think the goodness of God will let that labor of love go unrecognized in this life or in the age to come?

--Is it worth it? Is Jesus good? What do you think the disciples would have told you then? What would they say to us now?

--Or, think about the other option. What would the Rich Young Ruler tell us from heaven or hell? He could have been a follower of Jesus! He could have seen the crucifixion and resurrection. He could have been a companion of Peter, James, and John. He could have been filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and joined the expansion of the kingdom of God into the whole world.

--Instead, he chose to keep and enjoy his earthly riches which would be laid waste by Rome in under forty years.

--Was Jesus Christ good when he called him to sell all he had, distribute to the poor, have treasure in heaven, and follow Him? Yes. Yes, He was. So, so, very good!

Verses 31-34: Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."

But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.

--(31-33) Jesus takes aside His disciples and gives them even greater clarity on why they are on this particular journey to Jerusalem (9:31+51; 13:22; 17:11; 19:11+28).

--The reason being that ***all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished.*** Jesus' life and death and resurrection are the storyline of the Bible! (See: Lk. 24:25-27 + 44; Rom. 1:1-4.)

--Then Jesus begins to detail the sufferings He would endure on our behalf. As He draws nearer, we see Him going into greater detail than He previous references:

--5:35: ***the Bridegroom will be taken away from them. . .***

--9:21-22: ***The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and raised the third day.***

--9:43-45: ***the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men.***

--12:50: ***I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!***

--13:32-33: ***for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.***

--17:25: ***But He must first suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.***

--But here, closer to Jerusalem, He seems to linger on the details. He knew what was coming all along, and He went to it willingly, the Lamb of God lead to the slaughter for us.

--His suffering is important for us to see. It was our suffering He took. It was real suffering not just "doctrinal" suffering.

--First, it is important for us to see that He truly carried our sin and shame. The mockery, insults, and spit we deserved were put on Him. The death we deserved. The judgment we deserved.

--Second, it is important for us to see because we also carry our own cross in following Him. We too face real shame, mockery, suffering, and eventually death.

--Third, it is important for us to see His resurrection was real. That means our resurrection and acceptance into heaven will be just as real!

--(34) Our weakness and lack of understanding is all a part of the sin He carried. He is still so patient with us in our blindness and confusion.

*Bellett (The Evangelists, pg. 220): *"It is the cross, and the shame of it too, that He is called to sustain—all human countenance and support being denied Him. Yet He goes on without the least possible abatement of His energy in thoughts and services for others. We deem ourselves entitled to think of ourselves, when trouble comes upon us, and to expect that others will think of us also. But this perfect Sufferer was thoughtful of others as He was going onward, though every step of His way only conducted Him to still deeper sorrows; and He had reason to judge that not one step of it all would be cheered by man in return. His own little band, even, understood not the sorrows about which He was speaking to them."**

--The divine love expressed in the selflessness of Jesus Christ humbles and shames me. It also is part of what saved and redeemed me. He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.

--The best move for a disciple of Jesus Christ who is struggling with some type of confusion is simply to keep following Him closely. Eventually, He will give us what we need, even if that comprehension is spiritual in nature.

****Luke 24:44-45: Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.****