

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

“The habit of preachers today is to address their people as though they were all Christians and just need instruction...men and women are being treated as saved who never knew they were lost.” [Lloyd-Jones]

*“In my lifetime I did not care to hear that word that cut me most, and showed me my lost estate aright. I was vexed to hear my sins mentioned, and laid to my charge. I loved him best, who deceived me most; who said, Peace, peace, when there was no such thing.” (Jer. 5:30,31).
[Bunyan, John. A FEW SIGHS FROM HELL]*

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Two Men Went to Church – Only One Went to Heaven

May 19, 2024

Sermon Text: Luke 18:9-14

Scripture Reading: Psalm 51

Luk 18:9-14 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with

contempt:

(10) “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

(11) 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. (12) I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

(13) But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

(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.”

We have here an account of two men, given to us by our Lord Himself, as a rebuke and sober warning to people who regard themselves as righteous by virtue of their own station in life and their own works. *SELF-righteous* people. People who trust in themselves – people who look to themselves for righteousness before God.

I wonder if the Apostle Paul might have had this very parable in mind when he wrote:

Php 3:8-9 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing

Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (9) and be found in him, **not having a righteousness of my own** that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, **the righteousness from God that depends on faith—**

If we are wise, we will take serious note of the Lord Jesus’ words here and examine ourselves. Do we believe that we are justified before God? If so, then *where does our righteousness originate?* From ourselves? Or from Christ? From our works? Or through faith in Christ’s work?

Two men went to church, but only one went to heaven. The other ended in hell.

Two men went to church – the one for the first time, the other a zealous church member who was in church every single week. Only one as justified before God. The other ended in hell. In HELL –

Luk 16:23-24 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. (24) And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’

And so it is today? Which man are we?

The Lord’s Purpose

(9) He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:

William Hendriksen commented:

“There is no reason to doubt that Jesus addressed this parable to a group of Pharisees. That is the plain meaning of Luke’s statement. Jesus addressed this story-illustration to those who trusted in themselves and believed everybody else amounted to nothing. That this was not an exaggeration but a true picture of

what was wrong with the Pharisees of that day cannot be doubted. The parable presents two men, two prayers, and two results.” [New Testament Commentary, Gospel of Luke]

In other words, the “some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt,” are the Pharisees right in front of Him.

The Wicked Mentality of the Self-Righteous

“...who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.”

How do you regard yourself? And how do you regard others? An honest answer to these questions is vital.

When a person like the Pharisees consider themselves to be righteous before God because of who they are and because of what they do...when a person is *righteous in and of themselves, thinking that they surely merit*

God's approval, they inevitably regard other people with contempt. They despise others. They treat others with contempt.

Take very careful note of this. This is wisdom from the Lord for us. *Those who trust in their own righteousness regard others with contempt.*

Contempt. What an evil word representing an evil thing. *“The act of despising. The state of mind of the person who despises others.* Contempt is revealed in actions, in words, and even in facial expression. *Self-righteous people regard others with contempt.* They despise them, have no use for them, consider them as having no worth.

I have seen this kind in the church many times, as have many of you. They regard themselves as righteous. As the finest Christians. Surely the Lord approves of them. That is their thinking. They point to their actions. They are – just ask and they will tell you – the most active and faithful church members, present at every meeting, serving in multiple capacities,

regarded by the naïve as the finest saints on earth. And yet -

Mat 7:22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’

These are religious people. Church members. Active church members. And yet Christ does not know them.

This kind, as our Lord says, regard others with contempt. *Ultimately their contempt for others betrays who they really are.* This is how it is revealed that they trust in themselves for their righteousness in God's sight. ***The two qualities go hand in hand. Self-righteousness and contempt for others.*** This contempt can reveal itself in comments, in facial expression, in dismissive attitudes, but of this you can be sure, ***when we see someone who regards others with contempt while exalting themselves, we can be absolutely certain that we are looking at an unregenerate***

hypocrite who is on the road to hell.

1Jn 2:9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

1Jn 4:20-21 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. (21) And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

I could speak much more on this matter – I have seen it in their eyes and words and tone – this arrogant derision. Their religion is a sham. But we must move on:

Two Men Went to Church

(10) "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

Jesus purposely chose the tax collector for His parable. Tax collectors were despised in that day. They were regarded as traitors

because they worked for Rome and often they were dishonest and took money for themselves. The Pharisees would have regarded tax collectors with intense contempt.

"Publicans or tax-collectors had paid a fixed sum of money to the Roman government for the privilege of levying tolls upon exports and imports as well as upon whatever merchandise passed through the region. They charged what the traffic would bear, huge sums. So they had the reputation of being extortionists. And if he were a Jew he was regarded by his fellows as being a traitor, for he was in the service of the foreign oppressor." (Hendriksen)

Both men, we are told, went into the temple to pray. Why? The Pharisee went out of his self-righteousness:

Mat 6:5 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they

have received their reward.

The religion of the self-righteous man is all show. To be seen by others. They have no real relationship with the Lord. They are hypocrites and the Lord despises them. They despise others, yet they are the objects of the Lord's contempt.

But what of the tax-collector? Why did he go to the temple to pray? It is probable that he was not in the practice of doing this – he may never have done so. Even as Jesus was telling this parable, the Pharisees listening to Him would have reacted with contempt – Ha! A tax-collector going to pray in the temple? Unheard of.

The Content of their Prayers

(11) 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. (12) I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'

Notice that he appears to be addressing God, but in fact (as Hendriksen put it) "*inwardly and actually the man is talking about himself to himself.*" After mentioning God once, the rest of his "prayer" is all about himself.

- I am not like other men
- I am not an extortioner, unjust, an adulterer
- OR even like *this tax collector*
- I fast
- I give tithes

I, me, myself. His self-righteousness is oozing from his mouth. He even shows contempt for the tax collector in his "prayer." Might we suspect that his prayer was verbalized loudly so that even the tax-collector heard?

The self-righteous "Christian" compares himself with others – with the worst sinners. He congratulates himself that he is so much better than they are. But what if he even were? What if he or she were the most moral, religiously zealous, good-works-doer of all? What of it? Our holy, holy, holy

God is the standard of righteousness. Christ is the only true righteousness.

2Co 10:12 Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.

Pro 26:12 Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Christ is the standard for righteousness, not man. To compare ourselves with others is as foolish as calibrating a yardstick with another yardstick. The only sure way to calibrate is to find the real standard at the International Bureau of Weights and Measures in Paris, France founded in 1875. It is *God's* righteousness which defines all righteousness. And all self-made righteousness does not measure up to His. Only the righteousness effected for all who believe by Jesus Christ. This, the

Pharisee did not have nor was he interested in it.

Many people take up religion and become zealous church members who are just like this Pharisee. Religion is their instrument for self-glory.

The Other Man's Prayer

Then there is that despised tax-collector's prayer:

(13) But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

Something had taken place in this man's life. God, by His Spirit, had overwhelmed him with his guilt. Of course the self-righteous who saw it only scowled at him and would throw him out of the temple if they could.

What should they have been doing? *Praising God that this amazing miracle was happening right in front of them. A notorious sinner*

repenting and praying!!

This man was looking downward, not daring to look up toward God. This would lead us to conclude, with good reason, that the Pharisee was boldly looking up as he prayed – having the audacity to march into heaven itself and boast.

So overcome with conviction of his sin, the tax-collector was beating his breast as he prayed. He was under true anguish of soul – something the Pharisee knew nothing of.

Psa 51:1-3 To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. (2) Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! (3) For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

Psa 32:3-4 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my

groaning all day long. (4) For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah

God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Now, there are two very, very interesting points in this 7-word prayer.

First, as we heard R.C. Sproul point out several times – the Greek definite article (ie, “the”) is present right before “sinner.” God, be merciful to me, THE sinner. [Note: The NASB translates it that way].

He sees himself as the chief of sinners. As the worst of sinners. Many, many, MANY, professing Christians have NEVER confessed this. They have never *felt* the weight of their sin like Christian as he set out from the City of Destruction with the burden on his back. They have NEVER prayed a prayer like this, weighed down, in anguish over their sin – a holy anguish brought about by the Holy Spirit.

This is why Paul, for instance, opens his Epistle to the Romans with 2 ½ chapters of bad news. There are none righteous. Not even one. None do good, no not one. We are ALL “THE” sinner!

The second thing to take note of in his prayer is this pleas – *be merciful*. He deserves nothing – in contrast to the boastful Pharisee who insists that *he deserves everything from God*. But let’s look further –

The word translated “be merciful” is *hilastheti*. Have you ever heard the noun form of it – *hilasterion*? You have, but you may not know it. It means, *propitiation*. This word and its various forms is loaded with meaning. The *mercy seat* in the holy of holies was the *hilasterion* because it was the place of atonement, sprinkled with blood, where the blood represented the Lamb of God who would one day propitiate or take away sin. Propitiation is to mercifully remove sin and its penalties by being appeased with a payment, an atonement, a redemption.

Now, how much of this did the tax-collector understand? We don’t know, but we do know that he knew he deserved hell and that *propitiation, mercy*, was his only hope. He was, in other words, though it was not really clear to him yet, looking to some Propitiatory sacrifice provided by God, through which he could obtain mercy. He was, that is to say, looking to Christ – though he probably did not know it.

He did have the Jewish sacrificial worship right there in front of him – he was after all in the temple. Had the Lord opened his eyes so that he began to see the Lamb to which these sacrifices were pointing? One thing is certain, *he was not looking within himself for a righteousness which God would accept. He was looking for God to provide it and hoping against hope that it was possible.*

William Hendriksen –

“He stands at a distance....He stands away, far away from the sanctuary. He is ashamed of his

sins, standing with downcast eyes. He keeps beating his breast, in self-accusation and near despair. He is earnestly and fervently begging God to be propitiated. He is hungering and thirsting for the one great blessing, namely, that God's anger may be removed and his favor obtained. His prayer is in the spirit of –

‘Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling’

And again –

“He singles himself out as THE sinner. A little later the great apostle Paul was going to do the same thing. He was going to say, ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, foremost of whom I am.’ [1 Tim 1:15]

Each one of us must think on these things very, very carefully. This concerns heaven and hell. Eternal life or Eternal death. Salvation or damnation. *These things are REAL.* Many, many people sit through scores of sermons in church for years, and yet end in hell because

they were like this Pharisee. *The righteousness they came to God with was self-made, man-made, deficient and repugnant to God.* Who are you? The Pharisee, or the tax-collector?

The Outcome

Luk 18:14 "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

Justified. He received the mercy he knew he did not deserve. The Pharisee? *He was justified in his own imagination, but in reality he was condemned.* His visit to “church” actually added to his condemnation before God.

I believe that Jesus intends for us to understand that the Pharisee went to hell. Why? Because the tax-collector's justification was permanent. He was declared righteous before God with the righteousness of Christ. We will see him in heaven. There is a sense

of finality at the end of this parable. *“Rather than the other.”* He exalted himself, therefore he was humbled by God, which means, condemned.

Just like the rich man in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the day came when this Pharisee looked up in hell and saw the tax-collector in the presence of Abraham.

Time marches on, hour by hour, day by day, year by year. The second our earthly life ends, we will enter eternity. What are you placing your trust in? Yourself? Or Christ? If you believe that all will be well with you before God, *what is the basis for that conclusion?* The Pharisee would reply – *“my own righteousness, my, what a good man I have been.”* The tax-collector, as he knows clearly now, will answer, *“the righteousness of Jesus Christ which I trust in for justification before God.”*

The devil is crafty and subtle with his lies. He creates entire religions – like the antichrist of Rome – to deceive millions and millions and

millions. And our own flesh is deceitful, eager to hear a lie about how righteous we are in ourselves. Take care. Take care.

Mat 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. (14) "For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.