

Luke 18:9-14

## Two Men, Two Hearts & Two Outcomes (One Exalted)

### PRAYER

Father I pray our goal for this morning would be, to be honest before you. To not be concerned with what others around us are doing but to recognise that you see our hearts. That you would search my heart. And as you do help us Lord to hear what you want to teach us today. Help us to come away with the attitude not of the prideful Pharisee, but with that of the humble Tax Collector who says *"God have mercy on me a sinner"*

Right at the outset Lord we want to ask for your forgiveness for our pride, for any sense of self-righteousness. For looking down on others. Lord we know that if we lift ourselves up, you will humble us. And we also know that when we humble ourselves you lift us up. We know that's where Jesus wants us to be. Take us their Holy Spirit. Do that work in us, for your glory....

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Recall Jesus' question at the end of last week's verses (Luke 18:8) *when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"* When he comes will he find people who have lived their lives faithfully in him, in total commitment to him and well prepared for his return? To help us see the kind of life of faith Jesus wants us to have, he gives us this parable, where we see two men, two hearts and two different outcomes, *where in the end only one, was right with God*. So the question we're asking today is when he comes, or of course if we go to him first, *with what kind of heart do we want Jesus to find us with?*

Because of historical context, it's a challenge for us to think about how this parable might speak to us, and to appreciate what a first century follower of Jesus would be hearing. No one here is a Pharisee. Neither is anyone here working for the Roman IRD. That being said we still want to be impacted and inspired by Jesus' parable, in the same way 1st century hearers would have...

So let me put this parable into modern day terms for us...

## Re-telling

Two men attended church in Hamilton one Sunday, Barry Baptist and Lance Lowly. Barry strutted into the church service with his chest puffed out, welcoming everybody as he made his extravagant entrance. It was important to Barry that everyone knew he had arrived and to make sure they knew he was spiritually in good shape with God. But as he strutted into the chapel, his jaw almost hit the floor when he saw Lance.

Barry had known Lance for a long time and knew that he'd been struggling with drugs, gambling, stealing and had even spent some time in prison. Lance, had the courage to turn up to the service that day. So while Barry strutted to the front bold and proud, Lance sat quietly, slightly embarrassed, in the back seats. Barry Baptist was livid to see 'this guy' in church, the audacity! Lance was in church because, he was absolutely desperate, he knew his life needed to change and he couldn't do it on his own in his own strength.

The pastor opened the service and barely got the words out inviting others to pray as Barry leaps to his feet and in a big voice says *"Lord, I thank You, for all I've done in this church. Thank you that I've served you for 30 years, wow that's a long time isn't it God?! I've barely missed a service all that time, gone without a meal every week and Lord, I've even given you 10% of my very good income. Thank you that you accept (justify) me because of all the good things I've done. But here's the main thing, God, I don't have the foul mouth and the drug issues, 'that guy', in the back, who had the audacity to come to this church today, has. God I thank you I'm not like Lance. Amen"* ...he struts back to his seat.

Lance is hearing all this. He could have walked out, but didn't. Instead he quietly bowed his head. *"God, I've completely messed up my life, I need you. Have mercy on me, forgive me, clean me up and help me, Lord. I give my life to you"* Which of the two is saved?

What I hope we see Jesus doing with this parable is taking a very large spiritual stethoscope and testing the condition of our hearts. Are we like Barry? *Full of pride?* – have a strong sense of our own self-righteousness, that we've done it all for God, and we look down on others? Or are we like Lance? *Humble*, conscious of our shortcomings and our need for God's mercy?

Two men, with two approaches to God, two different hearts and two different outcomes, *but only one who was right with God.*

## THE SCENE

Let's take a closer look first at **the scene** as Luke sets it for us...

Jesus is speaking (v.9) *"To some who were confident of their own righteousness..."*

Meaning, for the Pharisee, being right with God was like a transaction. The Pharisee believed the good things he did, for God – outward acts of faith – attending church, prayer, fasting, small groups, bible reading, giving, keeping their laws, and being a good person – could be exchanged for eternal life. They had an elevated view of themselves spiritually against how God really saw them. All outward, without any real change on the inside. That was the state of their hearts.

Of course we understand, works do not save us. We cannot good-works-our-way into Gods kingdom. We can make every attempt on the planet to be a morally good person, doing great things, but can't trust, that makes us right with God. Only faith in Jesus Christ saves us.

Eph. 2:8, 9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast*

They knew about God. They knew about grace. They knew about righteousness. But they missed the fact, it wasn't the external stuff Jesus was concerned about, it was what's going on in their hearts.<sup>1</sup>

Imagine the scenario of Barry going up to A and E at the insistence of his wife. She's nagged him for weeks, he's kept saying *"there's nothing wrong with me, I'm good"* He goes up to the triage nurse who asks *"why are you here"* he says *"I don't know, I'm all good. I'm in absolutely fine physical shape"*

She says *"seen you're here well run a few tests"...*da, da, bloods, BP, cat scans, mri's, ultrasounds, the whole shebang...then the results come back. *"Barry"* she says *"you might think you're good, but you're not"* and she lists off several life defining things that are wrong with his health. *"No way"* Barry says and discharges himself!

The Pharisee trusted in what was good about the external things, but his spiritual prognosis (his heart) told a different story.

Some years ago a researcher surveyed 7,000 youths from a number of American denominations, asking whether they agreed with the following statements: "The way to be accepted by God is to try sincerely to live a good life." More than 60 % agreed. "God is satisfied if a person lives the best life he can." Almost 70 % agreed.

If the parable makes nothing else clear to us, let it be this: acceptance by God is not on the basis we're good, or have done good things, it is only, that we are accepted, through Christ, and therefore Gods mercy and grace for us.

The people Jesus was giving this parable to *"were confident of their own righteousness..."*

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<sup>1</sup> [This Man Went Down to His House Justified | Desiring God](#)

Not only did they believe they were good with God, they “*looked down on everybody else*” This is the attitude of an unconverted heart. “Looked down” is a very strong term and it literally means, despised,<sup>2</sup> worth nothing. That’s what a religious spirit does. That anyone else in the crowd could be as holy or righteous as them, or right with God because ‘they were sinful’, is something that would not compute in the Pharisees’ mind. They were as close to God as anyone could get and everybody else as far away as anyone could be. *O the irony!* It’s the attitude of an unconverted heart.

Remember the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the Great Commandment? Love others as yourselves. And, the fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy...Meaning, *looking down on others* is at odds with this, for people who are born again and filled with the Spirit.

That’s the scene....to them, to us, *Jesus told this parable:*

## **THE TWO MEN**

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

The two men, deliberately chosen by Jesus couldn't be any different.

### **PHARISEE**

NT scripture tends to paint Pharisee’s in a pretty negative light. To those listening to Jesus, this day, not necessarily the case. Pharisee’s were respected religious leaders in the community. *Here’s why?*

The Pharisee was a Scholar, a student of the **bible**. Could easily recite at least the 1<sup>st</sup> 5 books of the law and dedicated to upholding the law. His ‘Bible’ would be well used, probably one of those flash leather bound ones from the Manna bookshop in downtown Jerusalem, have little dog ears everywhere, grubby edges all through it and highlight marks all over the place.

He was meticulous in **tithing**. Not a cent either side of 10%. Every bit of income was tithed, even if they found a \$5 note on the ground, they would absolutely make sure that 50c was tithed. They were so meticulous they would even tithe on any purchase they made in the event the seller hadn’t tithed. So important!

What about the Pharisees commitment to **church**? They would show up twice a day, every day, those particularly who lived close to the temple would attend services at 9 A.M. and at 3 P.M. every day. Let alone other meetings, small groups and prayer that might have been going on. They would be on the host team, play the piano, lead worship and prayer, bring food every week for the foodbank.

The Pharisee **fasted**. Requirement was for twice a year; they would fast twice a week.

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<sup>2</sup> See Luke 23:11 *Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him;* Acts 4:11 *Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected;* Rom. 14:3, 10

And finally he loved to **pray**, in the most visible location, nearest to the holy place where he could be nearest to God and where he could be seen praying, so that others watching on would see a great example of what holy and righteous looks like<sup>3</sup>.

Bible, tithing, church, fasting and praying, they're all great things aren't they? What's the issue? We'll get to that shortly. First, what about the Tax Collector?

## TAX COLLECTOR

The **Tax collector** was despised, viewed as a leech on society. What was the issue? Tax Collectors were employed by the Romans to collect huge and oppressive taxes from the Jews, making exorbitant profits in the process, therefore seen as traitors in the community. Tax Collectors were not the people who were in your group of best mates, there would be no coffee dates or BBQ's with these guys. So despised were TC, in Jewish law beggars were forbidden to take any charity from them.

That's how Tax Collectors were viewed in the community. Making, the fact that Jesus speaks about Pharisees (pinnacle of religion) and Tax Collectors (epitome of wickedness) in the same sentence, scandalous! And even moreso, when it is the TC that (NB: v.14) *goes home justified before God*.

Two men. And now *two hearts*...and the setting Jesus chooses to give us in the parable – possibly because he's seen this very thing played out – is they (v.10) *"went up to the temple to pray"*

## TWO HEARTS

### The Pharisee: A Prideful Heart

Everything we heard the Pharisee did was fine until we get to this statement: (v.11) *The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.*

That's quite the way to start a church service isn't it?! Standing as close to the holy place as he could, and praying in such a way as to be heard...." *God I thank you, I'm not like them, especially not like Lance, here. God I thank you I'm so much better than them and don't have the issues he has. You should be so pleased God, I'm with you, that I'm on your team, you need me, you don't need guys like this"*

Did you notice what the Pharisee is praying here is reminding himself (and God) of the sins he has not committed? *"thank you that I am not like other people"*

What's the problem with that statement? He puts himself morally and spiritually above others.<sup>4</sup> He thinks he's morally superior simply because he's honest with finances, he's just in the way he deals with others, is faithful to his wife, fasts twice a week and tithes.

<sup>3</sup> And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full (Matt. 6:5)

<sup>4</sup> Diagnoses of his heart...

The irony being not only is their sin in making such a comparison and looking down on others like that, there is no acknowledgement of the fact he has, sinned.

### **The Pharisee's prayer showed his heart was:**

- Prideful
- Concerned with how he appeared to others
- Morally superior toward others
- Unaware of his own sin and need of God

We'll see shortly what the heart of the TC looked like? Stay on this for a moment. I think there's a timely encouragement and caution in this text for us. How we view others, and their sin? You 'see' any self-righteousness likes to highlight the sin of others, while ignoring the fact we also, have sin, and, sin. Self-righteousness gladly accepts all of God's love for us, and forgets Gods love is poured out (Rom. 5:5) and available for all.

Karyn and I so aware, despite our geographical separation that loving all of our whanau equally, with the same commitment and determination is a challenge. But we must. My point is this: love, given by God, is not proportionate to who others are or how sinful a person is.

A self-righteous heart says: *"I'm glad I'm not like them<sup>5</sup> and don't have those issues". A heart full of the Holy Spirit makes it difficult to look down on others, because you'll want to lift others up, you'll want to show compassion, you'll want to pray for their salvation. How we view others reveals what going on in our hearts.*

### **The Tax Collector: A Humble Heart**

Notice where's he's standing. In the background. He couldn't even bring himself to look up to heaven, beating his own chest, because he's fully aware that as he approaches God, he's a sinner.

Barry's standing up there talking about himself and how good he is. Lance is not high-fiving himself, he's not wanting to be the centre of attention, he feels no need to tell God the good things he's done. He knows he's far from good, and God, and quickly willing to admit it.

Phillip Brooks says *"The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is."* <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> ...Pride parade, man dressed as a woman downtown, ram raiders, people gluing themselves to the road into Wellington...

<sup>6</sup> [Sermon Illustrations](#)

Note how the TC prays (v.13) *"God, have mercy on me, a sinner."* He's a broken-as man. *I know I've got health issues and without you, I don't see a way forward"* He does only 1 thing, asks for Gods mercy: appealing for God's forgiving grace and compassion. He was the one singing *"who am I that the highest king would welcome me. I was lost but he brought me in... o his love for me"*

Let me bring in David's prayer in Ps. 51. We know it well, but it fits with what we see in the heart of the Tax Collector...

Ps. 51 *Have mercy on me, O God...<sup>10</sup> Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me....<sup>16</sup> You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.<sup>17</sup> My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not... (note this word) *despise.**

That's the kind of heart God blesses, God exalts, that Jesus wants to finds us with when he comes...

### **The Tax Collectors heart showed his:**

- humility
- awareness of his sin
- reverence for God
- trust in Gods mercy and grace

Two men, two hearts...leads to **two very different outcomes...**

(v. 14) *"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

We'll realise that the Parable is about the condition of our hearts, which is critical to our place in the Kingdom of God. **The Pharisee**, for all the good he did, exalted himself, trusted in himself, looked down on others...went home, unchanged, unjustified and unsaved!

It is the **Tax Collector** who went home, justified, free, delivered, exalted and saved!

One of the most important verses in the Bible: 2 Cor. 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*<sup>7</sup>It is like the Lord Jesus has stood in a court room with you, the judge has looked at you and said guilty, guilty for all your sin.

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<sup>7</sup> We can be as confident as we want to be to be with our righteousness but without Christ, and his righteousness imputed to us, we will not be saved

And Jesus stands in the gap and says, I have taken the punishment on myself for this man's sin. He has sought mercy and he is cleared of any and all charges, is forgiven, and set free.

Self-righteousness and *pride* can stand in the way...In the summer of 1986, two ships collided in the Black Sea off the coast of Russia. Hundreds of passengers died as they were thrown into the icy water. Things got decidedly worse following an investigation that revealed the cause of the accident. It wasn't a technology problem, a radar malfunction, or even thick fog. The cause was human stubbornness. Each captain was aware of the other ship's presence nearby. Both could have steered clear, but the investigation showed neither captain wanted to give way to the other. Each was too proud to yield first. By the time they came to **their senses**, it was too late.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus said when he comes will he find faith on the earth? When Jesus comes how will he find you? The condition of our hearts is critical to our place in the Kingdom of God.

Two men, two hearts, two outcomes...

I want to encourage you this morning. Let's have the courage to admit, if we know we're not right with God. I know our hearts over time, can cool toward God, and others. We busy ourselves doing things and the things take place of real worship of God. Our fire burns a little dimmer. Our love for God, on the inside is not what it once was. Sin, seems to creep at the door more regularly. And we compensate for this (*what's in our hearts*) by putting on a religious show. We know we're not right with God<sup>9</sup>.

Come before God...*have mercy on me a sinner.*

Where pride stands in the way of walking with Christ, and being in his kingdom, humility opens the door.

That's the kind of heart God blesses, God exalts, the kind of heart Jesus wants us to find us with when he comes.

*"Create in me..."*

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<sup>8</sup> [Sermon Illustrations](#)

<sup>9</sup> We think we'll be ok...