

Four Graces of the Christian Life: Introduction

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[0 : 00] The Gospel of Luke, the 18th chapter. Luke chapter 18, and I'll be reading Jesus' parable starting at verse 9.

Jesus told this parable.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself.

God, I thank you that I am not like all other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. But the tax collector stood at a distance.

[1 : 10] He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Well, this morning we are moving on from our study of the goodness of God. God, not moving on from the goodness of God, as his goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life.

And then for the believer, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, where goodness just goes crazy. Forever and ever. Forever and ever. Forever. And I trust that we're more aware of it.

We're looking for his goodness, and then we make the proper responses to it. But today we begin a new study, one that I'm calling Four Graces of the Christian Life.

[2 : 24] Four Graces of the Christian Life. I'm just going to dig right in in answering several questions as I introduce this study. The first is, what is a grace, as referred to in our passage here?

A grace is a virtue or a character quality of a Christian. These are not qualities that we're born with. Rather, they're the work of God in the heart and life of the believer.

They're the product of his grace. The fruit of the Holy Spirit's transforming presence and power in our lives. Because it's he who stamps the heart and life of his people with Christ-like characteristics or graces.

Yet at the same time, as we saw last week in 2 Peter chapter 1, we are to be pursuing such graces, adding them to our faith, making every effort to add them to our faith.

And that, too, is part of what it means to grow in grace, to be growing in the graces of our Lord Jesus. So our study is of four graces, four character qualities in the Christian life.

[3 : 41] Question number two. What are those four graces that we will study? Well, humility, faith, hope, and love.

Question number three. Why only four graces and why these four? After all, aren't there nine graces listed in Galatians 5 as the fruit of the Spirit?

Yes, there are. And that's not an all-inclusive list. We find other lists elsewhere in the New Testament that have other graces that are not found in Galatians chapter 5.

I suppose we could find at least 30 graces of the Christian life. 30. God-produced character qualities of the Christian.

Now, I've not counted, but I would assume at least that many. But I'm limiting our study here to four. Why? And why these four? Well, that's something I want to explain.

[4 : 44] First of all, because the New Testament gives special emphasis to these four. Often, three of these graces are singled out and grouped together in the Scriptures.

Faith, hope, and love are given special mention, aren't they, in the New Testament? Indeed, they've been called the triad of Christian graces.

And I want you to see four passages where the Apostle Paul does this. So, turn to Colossians chapter 1 and verse 3.

Be looking for these three special graces of faith, hope, and love as I read Colossians 1, 3 to 5. Having given the familiar greeting to the church and the saints at Colossians 1, the Apostle Paul says, We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints.

The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you.

[6 : 05] Now, I don't know if you mark your Bible. If you do, you might want to circle those three, faith, hope, and love. Paul highlights them. Now, this faith and hope, or this faith and love and hope that Paul heard about in the Colossians was the Colossians' faith, hope, and love.

So, why is Paul moved to thank God? Well, precisely because he is the source of faith, hope, and love. And so, if he works faith, hope, and love in them and has heard of that faith, hope, and love, he turns at once and thanks God for what he's heard is found in the way of Christian graces in his brothers and sisters at Colossae.

And then, notice as well, the interconnectedness of these graces. Faith and love are said to spring from what?

From hope. As the product of hope. A byproduct of hope. So, as we study these four graces that we're going to see in our study, we'll want to point out the way that these graces interact with each other.

That's the first text. Turn over to 1 Thessalonians 1. And again, notice this triad of Christian graces.

[7 : 32] Verse 2. After the greeting, we always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice the powerful effects of these graces in the life. They produce work. They prompt labor.

And they inspire endurance. And then, toward the end of this same letter in chapter 5 and verse 8, if you would turn over 1 Thessalonians 5.8, Paul says, But since we belong to the day, some belong to the night, and their works show it.

But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and hope, the hope of salvation as a helmet.

Here, this triad of graces are seen to be part of the Christian's armor to protect us from our spiritual enemies in this battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

[8 : 53] That's three texts. I said four. The most familiar text, you need not even turn to it, is 1 Corinthians 13.

And coming at the end of that great chapter on love, what does Paul say? He says, And now, three remain. Faith, hope, and love.

But the greatest of these is love. Do you see the grouping of these three graces found often in the writings of the Apostle Paul? Now, when he says love is the greatest, he's not putting down the other two.

After all, he's elevated them. They're a part of the big three he's shown us. And he's already told us in Colossians, as we've looked, that love itself springs from what?

Hope. Hope. So love is the greatest, but love springs from hope. So we can't do without hope, or we don't have love. And besides, faith is the virtue and the grace that unites us to Christ and to his righteousness and every other blessing found in Christ.

[10 : 04] No, he's not diminishing these other two graces. He is rather here arguing for the supremacy of love because it outlasts the other two. Love never fails.

Love never ends. Whereas faith will be turned to sight one day and hope will be turned to glad fruition.

But love will go on and on and on, even after faith and hope are no longer needed. Therefore, love is the supreme grace.

Well, these three graces, then, are given special status in the writings of the Apostle Paul. Not just here. There's other texts. Ephesians 4, Romans 5. You can read those for your own.

And it's not just Paul. It's not that he invented this. Peter does the same in his letter. The writer to the Hebrews, chapter 10, verses 22 to 24.

[11 : 02] Let me just give you those. The let us statements. Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Faith, hope, and love. So, in 1 Peter 1, 21 and 22.

Others as well. Other passages. So, what we take away is that very early on in the Christian faith and after our Lord's resurrection, we find this special emphasis on these three graces.

And that probably is just a reflection of our Lord's emphasis of the same three. Humility. So, that, you say, well, that accounts for three of the four, John. Faith, hope, and love.

But why have you added a fourth? Humility. Well, that's a good question and it deserves an answer. So, I've got four reasons. Humility is added because of its importance in the Christian life, which is also emphasized throughout the scripture.

[12 : 13] And in many of the lists of graces, humility is found right alongside of the other three, the triad of graces. Augustine says, Should you ask me, what is the first thing in religion?

I should reply, the first thing is humility. The second thing is humility. And yes, the third thing is humility.

It meets you at the very outset of the Christian life. The first step of the Christian life is one of humility. And it goes right on through for every step of the Christian life.

Now, either Augustine is exaggerating or else scripture itself emphasizes the importance of humility in the Christian life. You'll need to come to your own conclusion on that as we examine the evidence.

But I think he's got it right. So, humility is emphasis in the scripture. Secondly, humility is such a dominant feature in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our example of Christian graces for the Christian life.

[13 : 28] Did you know that this is one of his own self-descriptions? His humility. His humility. Come to me. And don't be afraid to come to me.

Come and learn from me. Why? Because I am gentle and humble in heart. That's how he explains himself to us. I'm humble in heart. Don't be afraid to come to me.

Christ exemplified that humility before them, his disciples as well. It's one of the striking features of his life, isn't it?

When we remember who he is, the son of man, the eternal son of God. Paul found it staggering in Philippians chapter two, that he who is the very God of gods should humble himself.

In order to save us wretched sinners. That he would stoop so low that though being God, he wouldn't cling to those perks and blessings of deity there in heaven with his father.

[14 : 33] But he became a man, a lowly human being compared to deity. And not just a man, but a servant. And he became obedient unto death.

And not just any death, but the death of the cross. And Paul says, let this mind and attitude be in you, which was also in Christ. This humility.

That he who was so rich would become so poor to enrich us. It's a major feature of the character of our Lord Jesus.

And then thirdly, humility often figured into Christ's teaching and preaching ministry. He placed it first in his beatitudes. That mark out the citizens of his kingdom.

What are they like, Jesus? Oh, they're a blessed people. Blessed are the poor in spirit. A poverty of spirit. A humility.

[15 : 34] For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And how often with the twelve do we find the Lord Jesus belaboring this very point of humility with them? You say, well, that's because they were so slow to learn it.

Well, they're just an expression of what we are. And hence the need for this because of its importance in the Christian life. And so they were wanting to know who's the greatest.

That's the question that was driving them. Who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child and had him stand in their midst. I tell you the truth.

That unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Many other texts could be listed. You know that emphasis if you've been reading the New Testament for long. But there's a fourth reason I'm including humility in this study. And it's because humility is also foundational to the other graces.

[16 : 41] It's not only emphasized in the scriptures and in Jesus and his teaching. It's foundational to all the other graces of the Christian life.

Augustine again. Quote, humility is the foundation of all the other virtues. Hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist, there cannot be any other virtue. Except the appearance. Except in appearance. But not in reality. There can be no real faith without humility.

For all real faith is humble faith. There can be no real love without humility. Because love is not proud. And real love is humble love.

And there can be no real hope. Apart from humble hope. So humility is the foundation. It's the fountain from which these other graces flow.

[17:48] It's required by all the other three. And I'll illustrate that in just a minute. So that's why in our study, we will be studying humility along with faith, hope, and love.

The four graces. Well, our last question for introduction is, what is the defining activity of each grace? By that I mean, what do they do?

And they do much. Those graces do a lot. But I'm narrowing the field down and just giving one defining activity to each one of the graces. And for this, I owe much help to my pastor, to my friend and the pastor, Murray Brett, in Commerce, Georgia, as we've fellowshiped together, to much profit of mine, over these four graces.

He got the first two from the Puritan Samuel Bolton, and he has come up with the last two. So if we could have the overhead at this time.

Here is the four graces of the Christian life we'll be studying and the defining activity beside them. Humility is the great emptier. Faith, the great receiver.

[19:00] Love, the great giver. And hope, the great motivator. Now I'm hoping that as we study these four graces, we can memorize that simple overhead there.

So I'm going to ask you to read it with me this morning. Let's read it together, okay? Humility, the great emptier. Faith, the great receiver.

Love, the great giver. Hope, the great motivator. Well, all of that by way of introduction. We're just going to plunge in right now then with the beginning of the foundational grace of humility, the great emptier.

And for today, all I really want to show is the relationship between humility and faith. The relationship of those first two graces. How they work together.

How humility must empty if faith is to receive. Let me say that again. How humility must empty if faith is to receive.

[20:12] Gage, could you come up for just a minute and give me some help? You don't have to say anything. In fact, I don't want you to say anything. It's one of the rules. I want you to go back here and you'll find two suitcases.

And just step between you, turn around and face me. Bring them out. Turn around. No, no. Sit here. It's not. Now don't let them touch the ground, all right?

All right. Right here. Right there. That's good. Don't let go of them and don't let them touch. All right. Thank you. Let me find my place.

I better hurry because you're getting tired. Oh, yeah. Yeah. I've got some gifts to give you. I've got some hymnals here. I've got some water.

And I want to give these to you. Here. Hi. There's one each for your whole family here. And if you're thirsty?

[21:15] Okay. I really want to enrich you. Here's my billful. Now, kids, why can't Gage receive the gifts that I'm so willing to give him?

Because his hands are full, aren't they? He can't receive without an empty hand to receive. His hands need to be empty in order to receive what I have to give.

So, that's a picture of the spiritual reality of the lost sinner. In the gospel, Jesus Christ offers himself freely to us and eternal life in him and all of salvation, forgiveness, reconciliation, a relationship with God as an adopted son and freedom from sin and riches beyond telling, heaven to come.

And he really means it and he will really give us these gifts if we will just receive them. But faith is the empty hands that receives Christ and all of his gifts in him.

Faith is the empty hands. Nothing in my hands I bring. We come to receive Jesus and eternal life in him with nothing in our hands to bring.

[22:40] Just empty hands to receive. That's faith, the great receiver. I'm going to hurry here, Gage. Don't worry. But left to ourselves, this is how the gospel finds us.

And we'll be seeing as well that too often in the Christian life, this is how our God finds us. And why faith is not appropriating so much from Christ. We're full and we need to be emptied.

And that's the work of this grace called humility, the great emptier. So that the empty hands of faith might receive Jesus Christ. Okay, so I'm going to be humility. There.

I've emptied you of what was in your hands. And so now I come to you with my gifts. And I say, here, Gage, have a hymn. And take another one. And take more.

Here, take them all. I have everything I have. I want you to have it, all right? Here. Take it. That's it. See, his hands are empty, right?

[23 : 39] Here's the bill. No, that's enough. That's just for us. Okay, thank you for that. You can be seated. And folks, I want you to let that picture emblaze itself upon your memory because we're going to come back to it over and over in this whole matter of humility must empty if faith is to receive.

See Gage with the two things in his hands that kept him from receiving anything that I had to give him. And that's the sad picture of all of us by nature as we come into this world and Jesus is offering us himself in the gospel and full salvation in him.

We're already full. And there is no receiving of him. What are we full of? We're full of ourselves.

Full of ourselves. Our pride. Our high view of ourselves. By nature, I'm full of myself.

Self-importance. Self-righteousness.

Self-reliance. Self-love. Self-satisfaction. Self-pleasing. Self-glorification. Self-serving.

[25 : 02] Self-will. Self-indulgence. All the selves, you see. I'm just full of it. And that's why I can't receive Christ and his gifts to me.

Where self is king, there's no room for Christ the king. And that's why if anybody wants to be his disciple, Jesus says the first thing to go is self. Whoever would be my disciple, whoever would follow me, you must deny yourself.

And he doesn't mean by that go without food for a day or a week or don't go without this thing or that. No, it's the whole self. It's self that must be sacrificed. And King Jesus, come in and reign.

He to be the one to save me. Not me be the one to save me and to find the life that I find pleasing for me. It's the grace of humility that empties us of self.

So you see how these two graces work together. How humility must empty if faith is to receive.

Now, let's see how this works. Turn with me to Luke chapter 18, the passage that was read for us.

[26 : 15] Luke 18, verse 9.

Jesus tells a story, a parable, and notice the audience that it's aimed at. Verse 9. To some who were confident in their own righteousness, they were full of themselves, full of their own righteousness, and they looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable.

So full of themselves and their own righteousness, confident that they were good enough and righteous enough to earn heaven, that God ought to receive them into heaven because of how righteous they were.

They are the target of Jesus' story. Now, this is no small category of people. There are many today, even as then, that are confident that their goodness will get them into heaven.

That's the religion of, sadly, most churches today. Be good. Good people go to heaven. Bad people go to hell. Children, be good little boys and girls and you'll go to heaven.

[27 : 30] It's the bad little boys and girls that go to hell. That's not the way of salvation. That's a lie from hell. No, we come to be saved because all of our righteousness outside of Christ is as filthy rags.

We don't have any goodness to commend ourselves to God for salvation. So, this is an important story. Not just for 2,000 years ago, but for hordes of people today who are confident that their self-righteousness has them right into heaven when they die.

And that's the message you hear at funerals. They were good. They did this. They did that. They went to heaven. Everybody goes to heaven at funerals, don't they?

That's not what Jesus said. Enter through the narrow gate. Narrow. Small is the gate. Narrow the road that leads to life and few there be that find it.

Wide is the gate. And broad is the way that leads to destruction. And many there are that find it and go in. So, here's the target audience.

[28 : 40] Self-righteous, self-confident people in their goodness. And it's a simple story. Two men, two prayers, and two results. The two men who went up to the temple to pray were, first of all, the

Pharisee.

A very religious man. Belonged to the strictest religious party in Israel. And outwardly, the Pharisees were very religious. religious. But it was all appearance.

Because remember, without humility, there is no true virtue. Only the appearance of virtue. And no one was prouder than the self-righteous Pharisees.

That's why he's telling this story, you see. That's why he's got a Pharisee in it. Inwardly proud of their own law-keeping, thinking God ought to be impressed with it and let them into heaven.

And they were not only righteous in their own eyes, but the people looked up to them. Oh, there's the holy man. They were their leaders. These were the best in Israel. There was even a saying that if only two men ever made it into heaven, one would surely be a Pharisee.

[29 : 47] They worked so hard at it, you see. So the Pharisee's there. He's always at church, you see. He's very religious. But there's a second man who's not often there, perhaps never there.

And it's the tax collector. But in Jesus' story, he's there. Now, tax collectors were notorious for stealing from the people. And they did it simply by collecting more taxes for Rome than what were really owed.

And they just pocketed the difference themselves. And so many of them grew wealthy by robbing the poor in this way. And this man, too, had been full of self.

Self-love. He loved himself more than God who says, you shall not steal. He says, I will if I want to. I love myself more than you, God. But that's not loving toward neighbor.

Well, he loved himself. It was self-love that drove him. He didn't have love for neighbor. He'll steal from his neighbor if it will serve the interest of self. You see, same problem.

[30 : 47] Different aspect in how it's worked out. No wonder everyone hated tax collectors. And the mere mention of such in Jesus' story would have caused the people's blood to boil with great disdain.

They were sure if anyone made it to hell, tax collectors would be first in line. So in one sentence, Jesus has brought together both ends of this religious ladder. There on the top rung is the Pharisee that everyone thought was so righteous with one foot almost in heaven.

And there was the tax collector on the other end, the bottom rung, right alongside of robbers, evildoers, and adulterers. The scum of the earth with one foot already in hell.

And the master storyteller, Jesus, has them both in the temple at the same time doing the same thing to pray. Now everybody expects the religious Pharisee to be there.

That's what religious people do. But what in the world is this wicked tax collector doing in the temple? There's an element of surprise in Jesus' story.

[32 : 03] But there's a bigger surprise to follow. We come to their two prayers then. Two men, two prayers. Did you know that prayer is a window into your heart revealing who you really are? What you say to God reveals who you are when nobody else is there listening but just God.

Prayer, the revealer of the heart. And these men are laid bare by what they say to God. But first, we have the prayer of the Pharisee in verse 11 and 12 says he stood up and prayed about himself.

God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and I give a tenth of all I get.

Now, this is hardly prayer, is it? This is a man full of himself. In the introduction to the parable, this is the man confident of his own righteousness.

In the words of the last verse of this parable, this is the man who is exalting himself. He's preening his feathers. He's boasting in front of God. And he starts out his boasting about what he hasn't done.

[33 : 17] He hasn't sinned like other men. And he chooses some real gems to compare himself with, doesn't he? Like robbers. People that go in with a gun or in those days whatever, a knife and demand money.

An evildoer. That's just all they do. They go about doing nothing but evil and adulterers. Or, even like, I thank you I'm not like, this tax collector.

Do you hear the disdain? He's looking down his nose. Well, of course, he's got a high view of himself and whenever you have a high view of himself you're hypercritical of everybody else.

You've got to figure out everything that's wrong with everyone else.

And that's the way this tax collector. I'm not like them. And we can always find people who are beneath us in outward morality to make us feel good about ourselves.

I'm not like that man. I don't do what she does. And this man is glorying in his own righteousness comparing himself with the moral scum around him as if God's supposed to sit up and take notice and be impressed.

[34 : 30] Do you know there's only ever been one man that God has been impressed with? It's his own eternal son. And he looked him over head to foot outside to inside.

This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. I haven't found anything displeasing to me in this son of mine. He always did what pleased the father.

He never sinned in thought, word or deed or motive. He's amazing. Look at him, my son.

Hear him, he says to his disciples. Perfect holiness in heart and life and that under the severest temptations and trials that any man has ever faced.

He alone has merit before God. He alone has true righteousness and all else must plead for mercy with nothing good to say for themselves. Oh, but not this guy.

[35 : 35] He's got plenty to say for himself, doesn't he? He shifts gears from boasting about what he doesn't do to what he does do. Notice how he focuses on a few externals.

A few externals. I fast twice a week. Now, he's way beyond the call of duty. The Jew was to fast on the day of atonement once a year.

Oh, but this guy, he's really going overboard. He fasts twice a week. Aren't you impressed? No. Is God impressed?

No. It takes no inward power of godliness to fast. It takes no grace to fast. You just need to keep your mouth shut at certain times of the day and go without food and then pork out later.

you know, the Christless Muslim does it for a whole month at a time. Fast during daylight and feast during the night. But this guy's impressed with himself and he mentions it to God.

[36 : 42] I'm not like them, but I am. What I do is this. I fast twice a week and there's more. I give a tenth of all I get. not just my regular income, but we find from Matthew 23 they even tithe their garden herbs, the mint leaves, the cumin, the dill.

Aren't you impressed? God wasn't. It doesn't take grace to tithe. You just need to know how to count to ten. Nine for me, one for God.

Nine for me, one for God. But this is what he's he's preening before God his righteousness. You see, he's very satisfied with his performance as if God owes him heaven because of these things that he has not done and what he has done.

So his prayer is all about himself. He confesses nothing. He asks for no mercy, no forgiveness because in his mind he doesn't need either one.

He's blind to his own sins, though they be a mountain, more than the hairs of his head, he doesn't see his sins, at least sees nothing of the seriousness of them.

[37 : 59] And so his hands are full of his own self-righteousness. And though Jesus be standing before him, he cannot receive him.

He has no need for righteousness. He's got his all. What do your prayers say about you? What do my prayers say about me?

Do you confess your sins? What sins? Specific sins. Do you ask for mercy? Do you ever take the guy's prayer that we're going to look at next and make it your own?

Pharisee doesn't. And in stark contrast to the Pharisee's prayer, we come to the prayer of the tax collector.

It's a lot shorter. Even his body language tells a story. It reveals a humble heart convicted of his sin and of his need. He stood at a distance, not even worthy to draw near.

[39 : 05] He wouldn't even so much as look up to heaven. It's hard to look in the eye somebody that you sinned against and know that you sinned against them and you deserve their anger.

Hard to look them in the eye. This guy would not so much as look up to heaven. What he did do was beat his breast as if to show his inner heart sorrow and regret over his sins against that God. And if his body language is revealing his words are even more so, his prayer is short and simple. God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

So he sees this God of holiness for who he is and comparing himself to him, not fellow tax collectors, not adulterers, not murderers, but comparing himself to that God who is holy, holy, holy. He's nothing but a sinner. In need of mercy. Grace has come to this man. The grace of humility.

[40 : 19] It has emptied him. You see that. It's emptied him of any self-righteousness. He's a broken man before God with nothing good to say for himself.

And all he can say about himself is I am a sinner. This guy is saying I'm not a sinner like him and her. And he's saying all I can say about myself, I'm a sinner. It's what I am. I sin because I am a sinner. It's not that I'm a sinner because I sin. No, I am a sinner. And therefore, whatever comes out of me is sin. It's not done to the glory of God. It's not done in faith. It's not done in love. I am a sinner. Well, no righteousness here to chalk up to his merit with God. Empty handed, he comes and he just throws himself upon the mercy of God. Have mercy on me. Have mercy on me. Now that phrase, be merciful, have mercy means be propitious. [41 : 26] You've heard of propitiation, another New Testament word whereby God turns his wrath away from us and places it upon his son instead of us.

The only way we can escape God's wrath is that he turns it on his son. Sin has to be paid for. God's too holy not to. So either you pay in hell or God or Christ pays on the cross. And that's that's what propitiation was. God sent forth Christ to be the propitiation for our sins, to put our sins on him and pour out his wrath on Christ that that we might get mercy. And that's what he's asking for. God, be propitious toward me. Turn your righteous wrath away from me and show mercy to me instead of the wrath I deserve. And no doubt about this part in the story, the self-righteous crowd would be murmuring the audacity of that wretch. To ask for mercy from God. Who does he think he is? He doesn't deserve mercy. That's precisely the reason for the story.

[42 : 33] That's what he confesses. I don't deserve mercy. And that's when the Lord Jesus drops the biggest bomb as he quickly draws his story to a conclusion and gives the results of these two prayers.

The wicked tax collector, he went home justified is the word. justified, declared righteous, right with God. So in the courtroom of heaven, Jesus knows what's happened.

God, the righteous and holy judge has brought the gavel down instead of this tax collector, not guilty, but righteous. You are right with me. I have nothing in my law books that that that is outstanding against you.

It's all paid up in full. You you owe me nothing. We're good. You and me. That's that's what God is saying. Justify the tax collector.

And the self-righteous Pharisee. Goes home. Under God's wrath. There's no way that the crowd was prepared for that ending.

[43 : 45] It's just the opposite of what was expected. And the self-righteous hearers must have gasped with shock. How can this be?

And Jesus answers them. Here's the reason for this. It's the last sentence 14 B for and for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Here is a universal timeless truth found throughout the Bible and that Jesus makes use of often in his ministry. It applies to everyone for everyone.

everyone. Be he Pharisee or tax collector. Be he six years old or 16 or 66. This is a universal truth. For all times.

Whoever you are, whatever you've done, if you exalt yourself, you will be humbled. And God will see to it. But if you will humble yourself, you will be exalted.

[44 : 56] God will see to it. So it's either humble yourself or be humbled. But God will not have any man proud before him.

And this explains the parable explains the conclusion, the conclusion, the pair of the Pharisee was exalting himself, wasn't he?

I'm righteous, better than her. Him. I do these things. I'm good. Good with God. No humble sense of his sin against God. not thinking I'm so bad that God must damn his son in my place in order for me to have mercy.

No, no, no. Maybe that guy. Not me. I'm religious. And so he. He has no reason to ask for mercy. And so he receives none. He came. He goes home just as he came. Very religious. And very lost.

[46 : 05] And on his way to his eternal humbling in hell. Because whoever exalts himself will be humbled.

You know, there's no form of pride more obnoxious to God than this. Self-righteousness. Thinking I'm good enough for heaven.

God sacrificed his one and only son to save sinners. And you're saying that you don't need that. You're good enough yourself. You don't need to throw yourself on this sacrifice.

That's obnoxious to God. That's offensive to God. And this man will be humbled. But the tax collector, what was he doing? Oh, God be merciful to me, the sinner.

He's humbling himself. His hands are emptied. He doesn't claim any good thing why God should save him. And so cast himself upon the mercy and undeserved favor of God.

[47 : 13] And so, though he went up to the temple to pray, guilty before God, he goes down to his home justified, declared righteous. He went up a sinner on his way to hell under God's wrath.

He goes home forgiven, right with God, and on his way to God's eternal exaltation in heaven. Because he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Do you know there is no more delightful work for God than to exalt the humble sinner who believes. What a savior.

What about you? Jesus wants to spare you from that eternal humbling. He wants you to taste what it will be to have God exalt you forever, lift you up. So like the tax collector, humble yourself before the Lord.

Tell him your Bible talks about a sinner. That's me. I've broken your laws.

[48 : 26] I've rebelled. I've turned my back on you. I'm the sinner. And then put your faith in Jesus Christ. You know, all mercy flows through Jesus Christ.

All the mercy of God that any sinner has ever tasted flows through Jesus Christ alone. And that's because of what Jesus did. He did two things. He perfectly kept the law that we broke.

Therefore, he has a perfect report card, perfect righteousness to give to any humble believing sinner. You bring me your sin and I'll give you my righteousness.

And the second thing he did, Jesus did, is he died on the cross to suffer the punishment that our sins deserve. The same Jesus who was telling the story that day was on his way to the cross.

And there he would bear the sins of his people and endure God's wrath for sin so that sinners like you and me could receive mercy instead of the wrath our sins deserve.

[49 : 30] He got the wrath, we get the mercy. Well, what a Savior. Do you see the importance then of the grace of humility, the great emptier needed at the very first step and every subsequent step in the Christian life.

Needed to empty me of myself and to bring me with nothing in my hands then by faith to do nothing but receive, nothing but receive the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

Well, that's the glory of the gospel. That's what makes us glad forever. and we'll have a singing for all eternity. We're going to sing a song now then. Stand with me and sing as we glory in what Jesus has done for sinners.

Thy words, not mine, O Christ, speak gladness to this heart. Let's sing. Holy, holy, holy, holy God, we magnify you for your mercy.

We glorify you for your grace. We thank you for your son. What a son he is, full of grace and truth, the only righteous man to ever live with a perfect record of keeping your law.

[51 : 05] Oh, he perfectly meets our need. We need a perfect righteousness to get into heaven and the only one that can atone for sin. Lord, our sins, our guilt, it's too big.

It's against God and we're just finite men and it would take eternity for a finite man like me to ever pay back infinite wrath.

But we thank you for sending your own infinite son that he might there on the cross atone for sin as God standing in on my place received wrath from God that I might have mercy.

Oh, fill our hearts with gladness. Send us home rejoicing in the Lord. Thank you for Jesus that he's full of grace for us. He's full of grace for any sinner who will have him and he will receive us just as we are if we will receive him just as he is the only Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So apply your word to our hearts. Thank you for every grace. Thank you for any humility, any humbling and emptying of our hands that we might embrace Christ with the empty hand of faith and thank you for every benefit that is ours in Christ.

[52 : 30] We pray in his name. Amen. Amen.