

Humility in Worship

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[0:00] Luke 18, we'll begin reading in verse 9. Read through verse 17. To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, 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 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. 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.

[1:06] People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

I tell you the truth. Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God, like a little child, will never enter it. Keep your Bible open to Luke chapter 18.

You notice that this was a parable taught by our Lord Jesus Christ. And did you know that so far as we know, no one in history has ever taught parables besides Jesus?

None of the apostles taught in parables, although they repeated Jesus' parables. No other writer of literature has been able to do what Jesus did.

There is one place in Isaiah that comes close to it, Isaiah chapter 5, where the story is told of someone who built a vineyard and did everything he could for the vineyard, but it brought the wrong kind of fruit.

[2:32] That comes close, but not quite. And the parables of Jesus are absolutely phenomenal. And they become etched on your memory.

One of the things that made me rejoice recently was an account in the newspaper of a child in China. This is in the secular news.

A child in China who had been hit by an automobile, and no one helped the child or rescued the child. And then the comment was made, I don't know if it was by someone in China or by the writer of the news article, that they need a good dose of the parable of the man who helped the one he found beaten on a path, and the good Samaritan.

The parable that we call the parable of the good Samaritan. Well, I'm glad that newspaper writers are still quite aware of the profoundness of the parables of Christ.

Amen. If you begin at verse 9, one of the things that Jesus frequently did, not always with his parables, but he frequently told the meaning of the parable before he told the parable.

[4:01] And that's what he does here. He is writing this for people who are confident of their own righteousness. They have confidence in themselves, in their own good works, and they look down on everybody else.

That's the person that Jesus is teaching this parable for. And he exposes the depth of what's wrong with doing that.

And you notice Jesus began the parable that two men went up to the temple to pray. That's very basic. They went to the place of worship, and they intended at worship to pray.

When we go into the house of God, we expect to speak to him in prayer. We expect to hear him by his word, whether it's expounded by a preacher, whether we read it, taught by a Sunday school teacher.

Discussion between me and God when I go to the house of worship. So we begin with those two basic things.

[5:11] You have come here to a place of worship today, and you will soon go home. These men came to a place to pray, and they soon went home. And we understand that because that's what we're doing today.

Our generation is very confused about this subject of what worship is, and we only need to look around to what's happening in the evangelical world with what people are doing in what they call worship to know that there's great confusion.

So when you go to church and then you go home, perhaps with your family, perhaps with guests that you may have for dinner with you after church, it would not be uncommon to ask the question, did you like the kind of hymns we sang this morning?

Are you someone that favors that kind of music? Do you prefer an organ or a piano or a praise team?

How do you like to sing hymns in church? Maybe getting a little deeper, do you feel closer to God after being in church this morning? What thoughts did you bring home about God?

[6:29] What lessons did you learn in Sunday school or in church? And how do you feel? Do you feel better? You know that most Americans are not going to be present at worship on any given Lord's Day.

Do you feel better for having come and worshiped God? Well, what Jesus says in verse 14 is a bit troubling.

He talks about one man who went up to the temple to pray and soon went back home. He talked about two such men. And one man was justified before God.

That is, he was accepted before God. His worship was approved of by God. God was favorable toward that man. And the other man was not justified before God.

His worship was not accepted. So that brings up a more troubling question than most Americans ask, or even those who attend church ask themselves when it's over.

[7:38] Has God accepted my worship? Is he pleased with what he saw from me in church today? And of course, we know that God doesn't just look on the outward appearance of men.

He looks on the heart. And he judges by what he sees in our spirit. Was God pleased with my worship today? Is the question.

It's the burning issue that we need to think about this AM. It matters for time and eternity. It doesn't matter for time and eternity what you think is the best music to be presented in the church.

But it does matter for time and eternity what God thinks of your worship when you come into his house. Well, if we then look at this parable, realizing that God is sizing us up and evaluating what we have done in his presence today, then the words become very important to us.

He is the judge of all the earth. And he is righteous. And he is just. And when the Almighty looks at your exercises, your religious exercises of heart, then the seriousness of that question should dawn upon you.

[9:10] There are some who assume that God will be pleased with everyone who prays. I mean, doesn't God want people to be more religious if I go to the house of God and I pray?

Isn't it a given that he's going to like me better than he did before I prayed? Well, Jesus is saying no.

Some prayers do bring people near to God and under God's approval and blessing and favor. And some prayers do not.

So it's not a given that because you go to the place of prayer and even the right place of prayer, that you leave the house of God better for it.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, and one returned to his home justified and the other did not. On what basis does God approve of men and reject men and children?

[10:11] What makes God smile upon some and frown upon others after they've been at worship? When we pray, there can be some indication of our prayers from how we appear outwardly, and Jesus does judge both men on the basis of that, but so much more on the attitude of heart with which we come before God.

And first is the Pharisees' prayer in verses 11 and 12. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself.

The main subject of his prayer was how good he was. He rehearsed his best things. He was, being a Pharisee, he was very disciplined.

He did the same thing week after week. Two days a week. He denied his body of food and drink for a period of time. As a service to God.

As something offered up to God. And in addition to that, he tithed everything. That is, he gave a tenth of everything he received to God.

[11 : 35] But then, the other thing that pleased him so much is that he was not like other men. And when he made that assertion to God, he thought about the best things about himself to rehearse to God, and then he thought about the worst people that he knew to rehearse that to God.

I'm not like robbers. I don't steal from other people. And I'm not like evildoers and adulterers.

Maybe drug addicts. I'm not like them. Or even this tax collector. Now, it just, it wasn't a job to be a tax collector like it might be in our society.

And the Bible doesn't frown on all tax collectors. But these were men who were called publicans. Because to be a tax collector, they were sold by Rome.

The right to collect taxes from people. And Rome didn't care how much money they squeezed out of people as long as Rome got the right amount that they expected.

[12 : 53] And these publicans would be supported in their collection of money by the Roman soldiers who lived amongst them and over them.

Again, it's an astounding thing to think of our Lord Jesus Christ growing up in Israel when they were under the heel of Rome. when they had not had a Jewish government for 600 years.

And they did suffer under that system. And they were cheated by tax collectors. And there was nothing they could do about it because the foreign government saw to it that they paid.

Well, you would feel very uncomfortable under such a system. It's uncomfortable enough to pay taxes for most people.

But when it's a foreign government who is not treating you well, that would be very difficult to take. And I'm not like that man over there. I could see him.

[14 : 08] I could spot him a mile off. He's a publican. He's been cheating his own people to become rich. And he's been in collusion with a foreign government that oppresses us and we hate them.

And so this is what his pharisaical prayer was. We wonder if he was really speaking to God or if he was just talking to himself.

He was talking about himself. And yet perhaps the most astounding thing is that he could not stand the man who went home justified by God.

Whoa, that would go down bad with the Pharisees who hated the Roman Empire. You mean that tax collector who's a cheat, went home justified, and I did not?

Don't tell a Pharisee that. He isn't going to believe that system of religion. But he trusted in himself that he was righteous and he looked down on other men when he was in the church.

[15 : 30] His prayer does not acknowledge personal defect or need. And that was the Pharisee's prayer.

Next we have the tax collector's prayer. Now there was a great deal of indication of his spirit in his outward behavior. He stood far off.

He sat in the last pew. That's not to criticize the people who are in the last pew today. But he was so ashamed he didn't want to get close. There are reasons for sitting in the last pew.

But this man just could not bring himself to get any closer to God and the representations of God that were in the temple. He felt unworthy to be near God.

Again, this is a phrase that keeps coming into the New Testament from those who believed in Jesus Christ. They felt unworthy for him to come into their home.

[16 : 36] They felt unworthy to call God a father. And here is a man who feels unworthy to get close to God.

God would not benefit from his being close to him. He did not even lift up his eyes to heaven.

Although he knew God was in the heavens, he would not look in that direction as if there was any boldness in his heart.

He was ashamed before a holy God. They were the very eyes he did not want looking upon him and disapproving of him. And he beat on his breasts a sign of remorse and grief that's very deep in the human spirit.

And in the Middle East, we still see people beating their breasts when they are in sorrow. Very outward expression of their inward feelings.

And he was beating his breast with a sense of disaster that had come upon him. Well, you know, Jesus began his sermon on the mount by saying there are a blessed people.

[17:51] The Beatitudes, blessed are the poor in heart. Here's a man who is poor in heart. He thinks he does not have in his heart what it takes to appear before God and pray properly to him.

Poor in spirit. He is lacking in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. This was a man in mourning. He was beating upon his breast.

He could not look up to heaven. He felt the disfavor upon him of Almighty God. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, recognizing the lack in their life of righteousness, of holy living, because I lack that.

I am mourning and I am poor in spirit. Well, this was a man who was repenting toward God.

I hope you remember the catechism answer to the question, what is repentance unto life? The kind of repentance that leads to life? Repentance unto life is a saving grace.

[19:09] That means anyone who really repents has already received grace from God to be able to do it. Just as we saw that no man in his blindness can see the glory of Christ until God makes the light of the knowledge of Christ shine in his heart.

An operation of God necessary to repent. It's a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and at the same time the apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

I am a dreadful sinner but God is a merciful God. He wouldn't be praying if he didn't believe that God had mercy on sinners. But he sure felt himself to be a sinner.

So at the same time he's looking at his sinfulness and he's apprehending that there is mercy with God. Doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it to God with a full purpose and endeavor after new obedience repentance.

I will go from this place not living the way I have lived before. That's what repentance is. And you see that the the New Testament is filled with directing men to repent.

[20:43] John the Baptist came preaching the kingdom of God is at hand. repent. Repent. Jesus Christ began his ministry with the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent. On the day of Pentecost the people were amazed at what had happened in the sending of the Holy Spirit and they said to the disciples men and brethren what should we do?

Repent repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins and God will give you the Holy Spirit. Repentance that first act of entering into the grace of God is so humbling as an experience to recognize that I have offended my God and broken his commandments being grieved by it finding no strength to walk in righteousness.

He was not standing there promising I know I'll never do it again God but repentance believes that God gives his Holy Spirit to those who repent so that they can walk in newness of life.

And then the actual words of the man this tax collector he said God be merciful to me now I'm going to change it because if if you read were able to read the original language you would see it it doesn't say God be merciful to me a sinner it says God be merciful to me the sinner I am the sinner everything that a sinner is or could be I am there is no excuse for what I have done I am what you were talking about when you talked about sinners in the Bible that's me all of it's about me I am the sinner definite article makes a difference in emphasis I cast myself upon your mercy

[23:10] God be merciful he had heard that the God of Israel is merciful and so he cast himself upon the mercy of God David Psalm 51 says so much about how to repent create me a clean heart O God renew a right spirit within me cast me not away from your presence take not your Holy Spirit from me this man went down to his house justified praise God the sinner the man who brought no reputation into the temple he went down to his house justified because he called out for the mercy of God which made all the provision for sinners in Jesus Christ his son all that you need to have your sin washed away and to receive the

Holy Spirit repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit it seems very simple in expressing it but it's not so simple to do how does God think about our worship on what basis does God approve of worship when men come before him acknowledging as we had a prayer of confession confess your sin to God and ask for mercy and believe that there is mercy with God and that's why he sent Jesus into the world to provide merciful deliverance to all who call upon to all who call upon his name and that's why they

emphasized on the day of

Pentecost whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved do you have this proper view of God the true God we are talking about whether God will accept your worship of him and beyond that how do you expect the father and the son to respond to you on the day of judgment there are many who think of themselves as Christians who have never felt about themselves as the publican did and never repented of course a large group of them would say well I'm trying to follow Jesus commandments!

So that makes me a Christian right? I'm trying to do the Sermon on the Mount probably not understood well guilty and vile and helpless standing before a holy and glorious God that is a very alarming place to be and it cannot be done lightly and until you come before God in that posture of a publican you cannot be justified and no matter how vile you are you see Jesus chose the man who was most looked down on by all of his nation as the great sinner as the one who went home justified to give hope to those who will call upon his name in the right spirit in humility the complacent the proud the dismissive of other people maybe even wishing that they never showed up at the place of prayer although they need it

God knows the doctrine of hum of justification is a humbling thing because our works play no role in bringing our justification it's what Christ did for us his works that bring our justification now sometimes because we understand the doctrine of justification there is a mistake being made by people today who say good works play no role in the Christian life that's not true our confession says that salvation is described in three categories in the scripture one is justification one is adoption into the family of

[28:22] God and the third one is sanctification good works play no role our good works play no role Christ good works play all the role in our justification and in our adoption into the family of God but when it comes to sanctification you better be interested in good works if you're going to live a holy life and Jesus does want us to let our light so shine before men in that they may see our good works and glorify our father who is in heaven yes good works do play a role but not in justification and not in adoption into the family of God and then in verse 14 it says everyone who exalts himself will be humbled this is something that runs all through the scripture we find it in Proverbs we find it in the book of

James we find it in the book of Peter in the very same words God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble he gives grace to the humble that's why repentance is needed to receive grace and he went down to his house justified again so many phrases from Psalm 51 come into our minds and remind us of these things so many phrases from Psalm 51 and David's repentant prayer and the Psalms were meant that we should repeat them after him in 1st Peter chapter 3 Peter says that we should put on the garment of humility put it on like a garment wear it as a garment humility should be all over the

Christian we dress for church and it's appropriate to show honor to the Lord and to his people to have ourselves cleaned up and looking nice but we should be putting on humility to come into his presence because God resists the proud and he gives grace to the humble he is determined to do it and the history of the Bible is giving expression to that and illustration of that everywhere that to the repentant there is blessing given there is salvation brought there is lifting up in God's righteousness and giving peace with him forever more let's bow together in prayer our father in heaven we we do remember we who are

Christians we do remember that the very first act which brought us into your kingdom though it could only be done with your help it did have to do with humbling ourselves and confessing our sins and crying out for mercy we pray for those who are here who may not yet be Christians for the young people who may not yet be Christians may they become aware of their sins and be humbled by it and cry out to you for mercy and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and will you give them the Holy Spirit we pray to make them a holy people and servants in your kingdom forever more and we would say please keep us from being like that Pharisee we have those tendencies within us we read the newspapers and we think of those bad people in other parts of the country and in dens of iniquity but our hearts came into this world as wicked as theirs and we have had thoughts that are not pleasing in your sight and we have done deeds that need the cleansing that could only come from the blood of

Christ and we are humbled to find out and to know that nothing would cleanse away our sin but the blood of the son of God it was that evil in your sight so cleanse us today and bless us as we go on

our way rejoicing that there is mercy with God and may that message sit with our young people that they may know if they do not repent and believe today that there is a God who is merciful and that all who call upon him will have their sins removed we ask that that message may rest with them and be written upon their consciences and we pray!

[33 : 49] Jesus name Amen