

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

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Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] As I preach the Word of God to you week by week, I don't know what's going on in your heart. I don't see your heart. But things were different when Jesus preached to his hearers.

He saw everything. John says he did not need man's testimony about men because he knew what was in a man. And so as he preached and saw the faces of his hearers, he knew exactly, not just what they had done that week, but what they were thinking right then on the spot.

And that allowed our Savior to direct his message with pinpoint precision to a very specific needs in his hearers. And such was the case of this parable before us in Luke 18, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

This parable has a target audience. In other words, Jesus is not just hurling grenades indiscriminately into the crowd, just hoping that something he says may strike a chord with someone out there.

Somewhere. No, he has individual people in the crosshairs of his gospel gun. He sees what they're thinking and he's speaking to a target audience.

[1:31] The parable is tailor-made for these certain people. And in verse 9, we're told who these people are. To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable.

So these people, as he looks at them, had two faults. Number one, they were confident of their own righteousness. Or, as some translations put it, they trusted in themselves that they were righteous. They've got a whole wrong understanding of the gospel, of the way that we sinners are made right with God so that God looks upon us with favor.

Ask one of these, why should God accept you into heaven? And they'll say, well, because I've tried my best to keep the golden rule, the ten commandments. I try to treat people well.

Well, God will accept me because of the good things that I do and the bad things that I don't do.

That's self-righteousness. Thinking we're good enough for God.

[2:39] A salvation earned by our own performance of good works. And I'm convinced that most people in church today have that view of salvation and of the gospel. And that's why the majority of them believe that God helps those who help themselves.

Most children think, if I'm a good boy, I'll go to heaven. If I'm a good girl, I'll go to heaven. It's the bad guys that go to hell, the good guys go to heaven. And it's a lie we were born with, and only the saving and sanctifying grace of God can get it out of our system.

Calvin says, all have it so deeply fixed in the marrow of their bones that it can only scarcely be removed, and that by God alone.

We tend to think highly of ourselves. So high that we think God will accept us for some things that we do and don't do.

Now, this self-righteous pride is a mother sin. We're bad enough if that's all it was. Just the fault being that we think ourselves righteous before God.

[3:48] But there's always this child tagging along with this mother sin of self-righteousness. And it's that we look down on others. It's that we despise others.

We hold them in contempt. And so, as Jesus says, to some who are confident of their own righteousness and look down on everybody else.

Show me a self-righteous person, and I'll show you someone that thinks less of others than he ought to think. A holier-than-thou attitude that despises others as beneath them, that belittles them, that treats them as nobodies, treats them with disdain.

So don't miss the connection here in Luke's introductory statement to this parable. There's a tight connection between self-righteousness and looking down our noses on others. Your view of

yourself affects your view of others.

If you are seven foot tall, how do other people look to you? They look short, like pygmies. But if you're three foot tall, how do other people look to you?

[5:01] They look like giants. Your view of yourself affects your view of others. And if in your own sight you see yourself as righteous, you think of others as being beneath you.

What you are in your own eyes affects how you view others. So what are you in your own eyes? A spiritual giant or a pygmy?

A giant who thinks you're so holy that God will accept you for the good things you've done? Then in that dizzying height, you will scorn others.

So have you ever noticed how self-righteous people are very judgmental, very critical and harsh and unforgiving of others?

Those who think they have it all together have little mercy and little grace for those who don't have it all together. And when you think too highly of yourself, you'll think lowly of others.

[6:11] So Jesus had these people in the crowd that day. As he looked out, he, ah, look at that. And he sees the self-righteousness. And he sees the attitude that's looking down toward others.

And he speaks to it. Now they wouldn't, it wasn't that they were going around shouting how great they were. No, that wouldn't look humble.

And looking humble was an important part of looking holy. So they weren't doing this out loud, mind you. And they may not have been outwardly railing on others.

You see, self-righteousness is an attitude of the heart. And it was their inner thoughts that were full of their own goodness. And it was in their thoughts that they looked down on others. And Jesus was reading their thoughts because he's God.

Even as he's reading your thoughts this morning. And he sees what you think of your own righteousness. And he sees what you think of your neighbor, the person here beside you.

[7:19] And he's out to correct our wrong thinking about ourselves, about our brothers and sisters, our neighbors. And about himself and the way to be right with him.

And he does so by telling a story. It's a story about two men. Two men praying. And we're told their two prayers. And then we're told the two differing results of their prayers.

So let's listen to the one who tells this story, knowing full well what's in our hearts. First of all, the two men.

Once upon a time, there were two men who went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. Notice these two men are in the temple to do the same thing.

They're there to worship God. They're there to pray. There's the Pharisee. He's a very religious man. It would be seen by the distinctive garb that he wore. That this man was one of those belonging to that sect.

[8:24] That religious group. An elite group of about 6,000 men in Israel. That started as a reform movement within Judaism to separate themselves from those that disregarded God's laws and commandments.

There was a looseness in Judaism. And these men were a reform movement to walk more carefully according to the law of God. Well, their little group quickly went to seed.

And it wasn't long before their concern for God's law degenerated into a merely external religion.

They went far beyond God's law and added their own laws, their own traditions and fastidious rules. And by this time in Luke 18, when Jesus is looking on the crowd, they had turned their law keeping into a self-serve salvation. That God looks upon me with favor because I do keep the law.

Now, these Pharisees enjoyed a high reputation among the people in that it was a saying in Israel that if only two people got into heaven, one would be a Pharisee.

[9:37] So, the one was a Pharisee. Isn't it interesting that Jesus puts a name on this man in his story that would have immediately pointed out some men who were wearing some pretty distinctive clothes in the congregation?

The other man couldn't be any more different from the Pharisee than he was. He's a tax collector. Now, you remember Israel was occupied by the Romans. The Romans ruled over the Israelites. That means that Israel had to pay taxes to Rome. And so, the Romans hired the Jews to collect taxes from their own people. The incentive?

Well, they gave them a certain markup on what tax they collected. That was theirs. And the bonus was anything they could pilfer from their fellow Jews. And pilfer they did.

The tax collector. He's a thieving cheat. A betrayer of their own country besides. So, no wonder everybody hated the tax collector.

[10:44] And the mere mention of a tax collector in Jesus' story would have caused the people's blood to boil a bit. As they would look down upon him with utter disdain.

So, in one line, Jesus has brought together both ends of the ladder of social respectability. You've got the Pharisee, considered to be on the very top rung of the ladder.

He's got one foot in heaven, they thought. Or, the Pharisees themselves thought. And on the other end of the ladder, you've got the tax collector. The low-down scum of the earth.

And everybody thought, they've got one foot in hell. And Jesus brings them together at the temple. They're both there. And they're there to pray. Now, everybody expects the religious Pharisee to be there praying.

Nobody. But nobody expects the tax collector to be there. It's an element of surprise in Jesus' story. And he's got more surprises to follow.

[11:50] So, the two men. Now, we're told their two prayers. And as we read their prayers, remember that prayer is a window to your heart. That what comes out of the mouth is the abundance of what's in your heart.

And that's never more true than when we pray. And so, first we hear the prayer of the Pharisee. Probably not spoken aloud. But probably spoken to himself. The text says that he prayed about himself.

That's true. But it could also be translated, he spoke to himself. Verses 11 and 12. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about or to 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. Now, the first thing we want to say about this man's prayer is that it's hardly prayer at all, is it?

This is a man full of himself, preening his spiritual feathers before God. Patting himself on the back. It's what Jesus calls in verse 14, exalting himself.

[12:59] This man is exalting himself. It's what Luke speaks of in verse 9, being confident in his own righteousness and looking down on others.

That's what this guy's doing. Though it's couched in prayer. And so he starts out boasting to himself about what he hasn't done.

How he hasn't sinned like other men. And he chooses some real gems to compare himself with, doesn't he? Notice, I thank you that I'm not like robbers.

Like evildoers. Adulterers. And then his eye looks out and sees, or even this tax collector. Do you hear anything of disdain in that?

Looking down upon him? Exactly. That's Jesus' point. This is not exactly stiff competition to be comparing oneself with. We can always find someone beneath us in outward morality to make us feel good about ourselves.

[14:04] I'm not like him. I don't do what she does. Do you know that's what makes gossip so attractive to us? We enjoy hearing about the falls and sins and foibles of others.

And passing it along ourselves. Why? Because it makes us feel good about ourselves. I'm not like that. And he's rehearsing his own righteousness compared to the moral scum around him as if God is supposed to sit up and be impressed.

Do you know there's only ever been one man? One man who has ever impressed God by his obedience. The man Christ Jesus.

Jesus. Who perfectly obeyed every commandment of God. Loving God with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength. And loved his neighbor as himself. He looked him over.

He scrutinized his son. He examined him inside and out. And then said of him. This is my beloved son. In whom I am well pleased.

[15:16] Here he is. This is the one that impresses me. This is something to be impressed about.

There's none like him. And he alone has merit before God. All else must cry for mercy. Mercy. Mercy. Now, this guy has plenty to say for himself, doesn't he?

Why? Because he's not comparing himself to Christ, but to this tax collector and his ilk. So God describes such self-righteous people in Isaiah 65, 5.

And tells us what he thinks of them. He says, Such people are smoke in my nostrils. A fire that keeps burning all day. You ever had smoke up your nostrils?

It burns and makes you cough and cry all at once. In other words, it's a huge irritation. And then to have a fire burning all day long.

[16 : 22] You got a picnic and your neighbor decided to burn his wet leaves that day. So there's that big pillar or cloud of smoke that just settles in for the day. It gives you a headache.

That's what God says about these holier-than-thou people. They're a headache. They're an irritation. They're a source of irritation to me. I can't stand it. I could just put the fire out.

Isaiah 65, 5. The self-righteous. Well, the smoke was thick in the temple this day as Mr. Holier-than-thou is saying his prayers.

And in this Pharisee's prayer, the people in the crowd are having their own thoughts expressed. Well, the Pharisee shifts gears from boasting about what he hasn't done, what he doesn't do, to what he does do.

[17 : 18] What is it that distinguishes himself from the rabble of sinners? Notice the emphasis is on a few externals. He boasts, well, I fast twice a week. According to the law, you only need to fast once a year on the Day of Atonement.

But this man fasted on Monday and Thursday. And it doesn't take a new heart to fast twice a week. This guy's thinking he's getting extra credit points in heaven because he fasts twice a week, not once a year. But it doesn't take a new heart to fast twice a week.

You just have to learn to shut your mouth to food for a while. You know, the Christless Muslims do it for a whole month every year. They fast during the day and eat during the night.

Is God to be impressed because you close your mouth to food for a while? This man thinks so. He's pretty impressed himself. Just listen to him.

[18 : 20] And he goes on to the next little thing that he does for God. I give a tenth of all I get. Not just of the crop, the harvest that's brought in from the field, but even the little patio herbs that he's got.

A little jar of herbs there. And he's tithing the mint, the cumin, the thyme. I tithe.

Aren't you impressed? Should God be impressed? Doesn't take a new heart to do this. You just need to know how to count to ten. Right? Out of every ten, you give one to God.

One for you, nine for me. One for you, nine for me. I tithe everything I get. And all the while, he is neglecting the weightier matters of the law, like justice, mercy, faithfulness.

Not loving his neighbor as himself. Oh, but he tithes. He tithes. Of all the forms of pride, spiritual pride is the worst.

[19 : 36] We will pride ourselves about all sorts of things. Yes, even our great humility, we will be proud of. Well, the Pharisee is very satisfied with his own performance.

And he thinks it makes him right with God. He thinks that he is righteous before God because of what he doesn't and does do. But this prayer, so-called prayer, is all about himself.

He confesses nothing. He asks for nothing. No mercy, no forgiveness, no help. Because in his mind, he doesn't need anything.

He's blind to his own sin before God. Now, that's the prayer of the Pharisee. The religious man. The man that everyone went, oh, when he walked into the temple. There goes the holy man.

And now Jesus gives us the prayer of the tax collector in stark contrast to the Pharisees. Even his body language tells a story, this tax collector.

[20 : 37] That's what Jesus has in the story that he tells. But the tax collector, there's the contrast. But here we've got something different going on with this guy.

He stood at a distance. He's overwhelmed with his own unworthiness before God. He would not even look up to heaven.

You know how hard it is to look a man in the eye when you've sinned against him? You notice that? People get shifty eyes and they look away when they've got something against you. This man has a hard time looking God in the eye.

He would not even lift his eyes up to God. But he beat his breast. One commentator said, perhaps as if to say, this is the source of all my trouble right here.

My heart. Showing his sorrow, his regret. And if his body language is revealing, his words say it all.

[21 : 36] His prayer is simple. It is short. It's a heartfelt cry. God have mercy on me, a sinner. I love the short prayers of the Bible.

There's more prayer in this prayer than an hour of the Pharisees praying. Notice he has nothing good to say for himself. He is thoroughly disgusted with himself.

Not a word about any righteousness of his own to point to. Not boasting about what he does or doesn't do. Rather, we hear him owning his sin. God, I'm a sinner.

I am a sinner. I've wronged you. I've broken your commandments. I deserve your wrath. I am the sinner in the original. He's only thinking of one sinner on the planet.

It's him. He's not looking around at others to compare himself with. It never even occurs to him to compare himself with other sinners.

[22:34] Other men are not at all in his view. Something else fills his mind. It's the God of blazing holiness that he is standing before. And he now sees himself as he's never seen himself before.

As a sinner under the eye of that God. Have mercy on me, the sinner. He's not looking around to find others who are beneath him.

Rather, all he can think about is how far short he comes from the glory of God. This God with whom he now has to do. And so with no merit of his own to plead, he doesn't dare.

Doesn't even dare to ask for anything but mercy. What a beautiful thing just to see this man cast himself entirely on the mercy of God.

God, have mercy on me, the sinner. Please don't treat me as my sins deserve.

[23:33] That's what have mercy means. It means be propitious. God, turn your righteous wrath away from me and show me favor instead. God, turn your head. About this point in the story, the right, the self-righteous crowd would be chafing about the audacity of this wretch to think that God has mercy for him.

And it's then that Jesus drops the biggest bomb of all as he quickly ends the story and transitions now to drive home the lesson of his story.

And pointing out the two different results of their prayers. Two men, two prayers, and now two results of their prayers. Two responses as to how it's received in heaven.

You know, I think men give too little thought about the top side of their worship. And we just think of the bottom side of what we're doing in worship. And there's a proper sense in that, that we worship as we ought with spirit and in truth.

But do we ever think about what's going on topside? How our worship, how our prayer is being received up there. That's what Jesus does. He tells the crowd about God's response to these two men's prayers.

[24:53] And as we read this, we notice that Jesus claims to know infallibly God's response to men's prayers. Of course he does.

He's God. And so he knows what heaven's thinking about their prayers. And so he says, I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.

The wicked tax collector went home justified, declared righteous in the courtroom of God. And the religious Pharisee declared guilty.

The tax collector under God's favor. The Pharisee still under God's wrath. The tax collector and his prayer accepted.

The Pharisee and his prayer utterly rejected. Now, there's no way these self-righteous folk were ever prepared for that insight from Jesus.

[26:01] You and I have read the story a hundred times. Perhaps we know what's coming. But I'm sure the jaws were dropping. I'm sure that they were not only shocked, but were offended. Gasping and asking, how can this be?

The Pharisee? If only two get into heaven, one will be. And he was not justified before God. But this tax collector went home justified.

How can this be? And Jesus gives the explanation. For, he says, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Now, there's the timeless truth. It's found throughout the Bible in various forms. It's like a proverb. And Jesus himself made use of it often in the gospel records.

It's found at least three times. And it appears it applies to everyone. Notice. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.

[27:00] Be Pharisee, tax collector, Jew or Gentile. Be you or me. If you exalt yourself, you will be humbled. God will see to it.

But if you humble yourself, you will be exalted. God will see to it. It's humble yourself or be humbled. There's no way around it.

In one way or another, God alone will be exalted and man will be humbled. And Jesus says, that explains the end of my story. That's why this man and not the other went home justified. Because, you see, the Pharisee was exalting himself. He was confident of his salvation because of his own performance. With no sense of sin, no reason to humble himself and ask for mercy. And so he receives no mercy. He receives no sentence of not guilty. He goes home just as he came. Very religious. And very lost.

[28:03] Still guilty. Still under God's wrath. And on his way to God's eternal humbling, which is hell. And that's where the proud road of the self-righteous leads.

Because everyone. And don't think you're an exception, Mr. Pharisee. Everyone. Who exalts himself. Will be humbled. There is no form of pride more obnoxious to God than self-righteousness. I'm convinced of it. Just live your life. Maybe even a religious life. Without humble. Confessing. Your sins. And asking God for mercy.

Confident that you're not so bad as that God should send you to hell forever. And telling yourself you're not as bad as others and you are better than some. Self-righteousness, Jesus is saying, is the ultimate form of exalting yourself.

Self-righteousness, Jesus is saying, is the ultimate form of exalting. It's the ultimate form of exalting. It's the ultimate form of exalting. It's the ultimate form of exalting. Do you know, God has gone to great ends to provide a perfect righteousness for sinners who have none.

[29:16] He sent his one and only son to take on our humanity so that deity and humanity are now joined together for all eternity. He did that to provide a righteousness of his own.

And then he had him live under his laws and commandments. And he went around obeying every command of God perfectly. And then God sent him to the cross and damned him on Calvary. These are the ends to which God goes, you see, to provide a righteousness for every believing sinner who has none of his own. And then he raised him from the dead.

He exalted him at his right hand. And the audacity of some sinners to think that their own good works are righteousness enough for them that they don't need Christ's righteousness.

And Paul says a curse is on them. A curse is on them, Galatians. For if righteousness could be gained through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

[30:20] And that's what self-righteousness says to God. Christ, trust him and his righteousness alone. No, thanks. I've got my own. I've got my own. And God says, you mean you're telling me that my son died for nothing?

You who exalt yourselves will be humbled. Oh, but the tax collector, bless his heart. He was humbling himself before God, wasn't he?

He's here confessing his sin. He's seeking salvation, not by any good deeds that he has done, but from God's mercy and undeserved favor alone.

And so though he went up to the temple 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 on his way to God's eternal exaltation, which is heaven. God's eternal humbling, which is hell.

[31:20] God's eternal exalting, which is heaven. He who humbles himself will be exalted. And God is just as committed in exalting the humble as he is in humbling the self-exalted.

He opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. So there's the story. Do you see yourself in it?

There's two men. Two types of people came into Grace Fellowship this morning to pray, to worship God. Which are you most like?

Are you thinking with the Pharisees that you're pretty good and you didn't mess up badly this week? And that maybe God will look with favor upon you because of how you performed?

Or are you here this morning standing right beside the tax collector and saying, God, be merciful to me, the sinner.

[32:25] Do you justify yourself or accept God's justification? You justify yourself, you forfeit God's justification. Because he only justifies those who condemn themselves.

He only says not guilty to the man who says, God, I'm guilty. That's the way he plans salvation. So as to humble man and to exalt his grace.

Are you willing to be saved God's way? Through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, a hundred percent. All your trust on Christ alone.

And nothing on your own goodness. Or are you still hanging on to what you are and what you've done or not done? As long as you maintain anything of your own righteousness to commend yourself to God, God remains your enemy.

He opposes you. He'll oppose you all the way to the judgment day. But if you'll just come and own what you are and be broken that you're a sinner before this holy God and plead for mercy, cast yourself on his mercy, he will receive you.

[33:44] You may have come to church lost. You can go home saved. You may have come to church guilty. You can go home declared not guilty in the court of heaven. Forgiven.

What a gospel Jesus has given me to proclaim. A gospel for sinners. A gospel for the bad people. Like we all are. What a savior to invite you to come to. You know what the Pharisees branded him with? He's a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

You know what Jesus did with that? He wore it as a badge of honor. Friend of tax collectors. Friend of sinners. He still is this morning. They meant it is something shameful.

He wears it like a medal of honor. Pharisees, they wrote off sinners like these robbers and evildoers and adulterers and this tax collector.

[34:46] But Jesus came to seek and to save. Just such. He's willing to forgive sin. You know, the amazing thing is that the one who's telling the story is on his way somewhere.

The storyteller this morning is Jesus and he's on his way to an old rugged cross. And what he's going to do there is he's going to die in the place of his people. He's going to have all their sins on him.

And then he's going to take it to the place of punishment and be crushed by God's wrath. And that's why in the story he can say to this tax collector that he went home justified.

Not guilty. How can you say that? Because Jesus is going to go and take the guilt for him on Calvary. Isn't that beautiful?

The storyteller is the one who takes the wrath so that not guilty can be pronounced over this tax collector in his story. And that's the reason God does not treat anyone who trusts in him according to how our sins deserve.

[35:55] He treated his son the way our sins deserve. And he treats us who believe on him as Jesus deserves. He gets the wrath. We get the favor.

We get the mercy. Let's never be ashamed to bring our sins to this Savior. I think that for too long I have thought of this parable as only being applied to conversion.

And I think that we would be wrong to go away from this parable thinking that it's just a parable about conversion. It's about two men going into the temple to worship.

It's about two worshipers. Okay. And believers, I believe we're being taught here that this is how we are to come into God's presence. Not just the first time, but every time.

Humbled for our sins and hanging on the mercy of God alone in Christ. Every time. We approach him. This is to be our approach.

[36:56] We never in this life outgrow the penitence prayer. We never get beyond the need to approach God with these words. God be merciful to me, a sinner.

Is that your heart this morning? Do you approach God with that kind of heart? It tells the story of whether your worship and yourself is acceptable in heaven or not. It's interesting how Luke groups together these two back-to-back parables in chapter 18.

They're both about prayer. And verses 1 to 8 tell the parable about the persistent widow teaching us the humility in prayer. Or excuse me, teaching us perseverance in prayer.

And then follows this parable on the prayers of these two men. Teaching us humility and confession of sin in prayer. And that is to mark all of our approaches to God.

Do we come with this posture of heart? Humbly confessing our sins. Pleading for mercy for Jesus' sake alone. Believing that if myself and my worship is to be accepted in heaven, it will be all on the merits of my Savior.

[38:10] So I come in Jesus' name. I fear that too often our approaches to God are far too chipper and cheery.

that we do not regularly come before God confessing our sinfulness and hanging upon mercy alone. Should we not be taking these words upon our hearts and lips more often?

God be merciful to me, a sinner. Did not our Savior teach us to pray? Forgive us our sins. As often as we pray for our daily bread.

This is to be a part of our regular approaches to the Holy One. God be merciful to me, a sinner. So when did you last confess sin? When did you last name the sin before God? And trust in Christ's mercy to take it away forever.

[39:17] What was the sin? Or have we grown careless? And does it show something of self-righteousness that is invading our hearts that needs to be rooted out again this morning?

The fact is, I'm the biggest sinner I know. You know, when I look at you, you know what I see of your sin? A little bit.

Your outward slip-ups. That's what I see. Do you know what I see when I look at myself? I see my outward slip-ups. And then I see the whole inside.

You know what an iceberg is, kids? You know how much is sticking out that men see? About a tenth. That's what you see of my sin. About a tenth. There's a whole 90% that's hidden down in the water of my heart that I have to deal with every day.

My pride. My selfish ambition. And vain conceit. My lust. My revenge. My covetous thoughts.

[40:46] My envious thoughts. My bitter thoughts. My worrisome thoughts. My unbelieving thoughts. The idols of my heart that rival Christ's own place on the throne of my heart.

My love of money. My love of the praise of men. My love of ease. My earthly mindedness that pushes off thoughts of heaven and the spiritual world.

And on and on and on it goes. This huge, continent-like mountain of ice under the surface of my heart.

And that's why I tell you not with mock humility but with just plain stark reality. I'm the biggest sinner I know. And as long as it's that way with me do you know what?

I don't have time for self-righteousness. I don't have any. All my righteous acts are like filthy rags.

Look what I've got. Look what I carry around.

[41:48] An iceberg of sin. A mountain of sin. And as long as it's this way with me I don't have time to look down my nose at anybody in this world.

But to stand side by side with them as a sinner and to plead for mercy from a God of mercy. This is what Jesus is teaching us.

Not just the first time we come we must come and hang on mercy. Every time we approach God how do we come? How do we live in His presence? Is it with a sense of our sin?

Oh God could you have mercy on me a sinner? Forgive me. Pardon me. And blessed be God He's such a God that just does that.

You know the Apostle Paul was a Pharisee wasn't he? He's one of these guys that was self-righteous. You know what he found? He found mercy. He says I was once a blasphemer a persecutor a violent man but I was shown mercy.

[42:48] And to his dying day he called himself the chief of sinners. The worst of the bunch. David understood it. The first words out of his mouth when he came to God convinced of his sin of murder and adultery was have mercy on me.

Have mercy on me. I think Jesus is just telling a story to draw out perhaps David's own prayer.

That's what the poor tax collector prayed. Same thing David prayed.

Have mercy on me according to your abundant mercies. And this same Jesus who told this story to get us to throw off our self-righteousness and to come to him confessing our sins he's now in heaven and he's no different.

He's got mercy for you. Come every soul by sin oppressed there's mercy with the Lord. There's mercy not just a little bit. He's plenteous in mercy.

He's abounding in mercy. And he's not reluctant to hand it out and to give it to you. He delights in mercy. It's his preferred response.

[43:54] He would far rather show you mercy than to damn you with judgment. I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Why would you not rather turn and live? But if you are too proud to receive mercy then you must be humbled eternally in hell.

Oh, do you get it? Jesus delights in mercy. He's happier to give mercy than you are to ask it from him. This is the Savior we meet in the gospel.

It's the Savior who tells the story to correct our thoughts of him the gospel ourselves others He's the Savior who knows the hearts of everyone present.

and mercy mercy drips from his lips. Let's pray. Oh Lord forgive us for the days and weeks and months and years that we let pass.

it seems too much of our life is lived without a sense of how holy you are and how sinful we are but those two realities never change. Think of John Newton's words as he grew older I'm forgetting many things but may I never forget that I am a great sinner and that Jesus is a great Savior.

[45 : 29] So we would delight in you Lord Jesus and ask that you show us mercy again this day that as we leave this place we might go down to our hearts our houses justified knowing that you are pleased with us because of Jesus Christ and his righteousness alone and that we might enter into the joy and blessedness of the man to whom the Lord does not impute sin whose sins are never counted against him.

Oh lead us into that blessedness that happiness forgive all of our wickedness not the least of which is our self-righteousness and looking down upon others.

We pray it all through the mercy of our Savior Jesus. Amen.