



Part 3: The Freedom of Humility

Luke 18:9-14

Self-righteousness enslaves the heart, but humility sets it free.

“The parable reminds us that even the most religious person can miss the purpose, the goal of life. The text invites us to discover God as the living father and ‘that tax collector’, however, he or she may be, as a brother or sister.”

–*Preaching the Parables* by Craig Blomberg

IN ORDER TO HEAR THE PARABLES AS JESUS MEANT THEM TO BE HEARD, WE HAVE TO TRY TO ADOPT THE PERSPECTIVE OF THOSE IN THE ORIGINAL AUDIENCE.

- The stories of Jesus are meant to be mirrors into our own hearts and souls. We must understand the characters of the parables well enough to “get” them, resonate with them, and be shocked by Jesus’s take on them. Until we do so, we will hold them at a distance, and miss the passage showing us our own hearts.
- We need to “get to know” the Pharisee and Tax Collector, so we can see ourselves in them.
- Then, God can call us out of self-righteousness, and into the freedom of humility as well.

“GETTING TO KNOW” THE PHARISEE AND TAX COLLECTOR

The Pharisee:

- Would not have been looked down upon for being legalistic or too “churchy” as a person like this might be today. Instead was highly honored in Jewish society.
- Despite the ways it got perverted, the Pharisees actually had good intentions when their movement began. They had seen the pain that disobeying God’s law had brought on Israel and wanted

to bring reform and purity to their nation. Their desire was that if their people could obey the law, God would restore Israel. This is not a bad desire.

- There is also precedent for this prayer in the “Blessings of Identity” prayer recommended by rabbis at the time. A common one was “God, thank you that you made me a Jew and not a Gentile. Thank you that you made me a free man and not a slave. Thank you that you made me a man and not a woman.”
- While this seems obviously wrong to us, this man was operating in the framework of righteousness he knew. He was praying the types of prayers he had been taught to pray.
- As long as we judge this Pharisee, we will not see ourselves in him. Use this context to imagine how you might have adopted some of these practices if this was your context.

The Tax Collector:

Beyond just someone who took taxes, this man had...

- Betrayed his people to serve their oppressors to make a buck. He had become a tool for their oppression by a Pagan nation. This was the deepest sort of ethnic betrayal.
- Further taken advantage of his people by charging them more than Rome was asking for. This means they got rich by actively choosing to rob their fellow Israelites.
- This is a man living under the weight of sin both between him and God, and him and his entire people.

The Reversal:

- Jesus shockingly says that the Tax Collector is “justified”, and the Pharisee is NOT. Justified means that the Tax Collector is acquitted of his sins and now stands righteous before God. All while the religious leader receives a stamp of “guilty.”
- The reasoning is that “those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” It is important to note how counter cultural this was at the time and how counter cultural this is for us. Admitting our weakness, ugly sinfulness, need, and dependence has never been encouraged, and yet it is the key to receiving the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus is showing us that, despite what we have been told, our self-righteousness only enslaves us, but humility sets us free.

**HOW IS THE PHARISEE ENSLAVED? HOW IS THE TAX COLLECTOR FREE?
WHERE ARE WE IN THIS STORY?**

The Pharisee:

- Enslaved to following rules that God did not command him to obey. Neither fasting twice a week nor tithing on *all* he had.
- Separated from his people (stands alone in case he becomes unclean) and accuses them. He no longer does what he wanted

to do (bring purity) and instead must serve his self-righteousness (slavery).

- Still stands in slavery to his sin because he is not justified before God.

The Tax Collector:

- He has also been enslaved by sin. But as he comes to the temple his view of reality is *accurate*. He sees himself as he is (sinful) yet also sees God as he is (merciful).
- He is free to be honest about who he is, free to approach God, free to put down his masks and his sin.
- Most importantly, by confessing his need for God, he is freed by God from his guilt: justified.

EACH OF US MOST LIKELY HAS SOME OF BOTH OF THESE CHARACTERS IN US. WHICH ONE DO YOU FEEL MORE CONNECTED TO THIS MORNING?

The Pharisee:

- Life with God has become mostly about whether or not you are sinning and fulfilling your responsibilities. You don't often feel the need to ask God for help as you accomplish these.
- You feel like you are doing well with sin management, but you can't remember the last time you felt joy in God's presence.
- You find yourself having little patience and compassion on other's weaknesses.
- You feel more frustration with those who sin than love for them.
- The invitation for you is to ask God for a heart of humility, so you can receive the freedom of dependence on God.

The Tax Collector:

- The compromise of your sin has led you further than you thought you'd ever go.
- You feel burdened by the weight of guilt.
- You're unsure how you will undo what your sin has done.
- The invitation for you is to know that your desperate need for God is exactly what you need. God is able to bring restoration with nothing but your repentant need of him.