

## “Faith: Like THAT Guy”

### **Scripture: Luke 18:9-14**

Graphic: temple, prayer, humility

Key Verses: 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.

Theme: Our faith in God directly relates to our relationships with other people. When we trust ourselves, we get cut off from God and others. When we humble ourselves before God, His mercy and grace not only redeem us, but open our eyes to the His work in others.

### **1) Introduction**

- a) Buck did such a good job re-introducing our look at faith and prayer.
- b) Let’s open our Bibles to Luke chapter 18, starting in verse 9.
- c) But before we do that, perhaps you have heard the story of the man who came to the gates of heaven to be greeted by St. Peter. Peter asks the man if he can give a brief history of his life with an emphasis on the good deeds he has done, in order to gain entrance into the kingdom of heaven.
- d) “You will need 1,000 points to be admitted,” Peter tells the man.
- e) “This will be a cinch,” the man thinks to himself, “I’ve been involved in church from the days of my youth.” Then he begins to list his activities for Peter. He was an officer in his youth group, served in every possible position he could as a youngster. Was on the church council and every committee the church had to offer. His list was extensive.
- f) “Very impressive,” Peter smiles at the man. An angel standing with them also smiled and nodded as he tallied the points and then whispered in Peter’s ear. Peter tells the man, “This is quite striking; we seldom see men of your very good works. You will be pleased to know that you have 327 points! Is there anything else you can think of?”
- g) The poor soul breaks into a cold sweat and begins to reach deep for every single act of kindness he could think of. He listed them as the angel scratched furiously on his angelic clipboard and nodded his head in admiration.
- h) Peter looks at the clipboard and says, “This is quite exceptional! You now have a total of 402 points. Can you think of anything else?”

- i) The distressed guy strives to recall good deeds, like the time he helped a little old lady across the street. He finally arrives at a grand total of 431 points and cries out, “I’m sunk! There’s no hope for me! What more could I have done? O Lord, all I can do is beg for your mercy!”
- j) “THAT,” exclaims Peter, “is a thousand points!”
- k) In this next section of the Book of Luke, Jesus tells another parable about our expressions of faith...how we live out our faith in this life.
- l) And in this story, he contrasts the actions of a religious leader, a Pharisee, with the actions of a tax collector, someone typically despised by the culture...
- m) And he uses these two guys to illustrate our need for repentance and humility before a very holy and powerful God and how that can lead us into deeper relationships with those around us.
- n) And we’re tempted to align ourselves with one or the other of these men in the parable. But, the reality is, we have the potential to be either one at any given time.
- o) So let’s dive in to the Word this morning...
- p) But before we do that, let’s pray...

## 2) Scripture

### a) Read verse 18:9

- i) Right off the bat, some of us are thinking, “Thank goodness this parable isn’t addressed to me today!”
- ii) But then, we ask the question, “Who IS this parable addressed to?” We know the parable we read last week was to address directly to the disciples...encouraging them to pray persistently and consistently.
- iii) But verse 9 says that Jesus told this parable to “SOME”...
- iv) Is it the disciples still? Is it the Pharisees? Is it a crowd of people gathered to hear what radical thing Jesus will say next?
- v) I think the answer is YES to all those! And the reason I think that is because all people are equally vulnerable to pride and self-reliance. And

if all people are equally vulnerable to this type of sin, and if we believe what Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” then we have to conclude that Jesus, even though Luke says ‘some,’ is really hitting at our hearts as well.

vi) So Jesus told this parable to SOME who:

(1) Trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and;

(2) (some who) Regarded others with contempt.

vii) Luke throws out this term *righteous*, like we’re supposed to know what it means. And this is one of those Christianese words that people say a lot, but we aren’t always sure what it means. Let’s try to clear this up...

viii) One of the clearest definitions of righteousness is *being in a right relationship with God*. And this has everything to do with Jesus and not much to do with us. Jesus died on the cross so we could be in a right-relationship with God – sins forgiven, being made holy, walking with the Lord – able to stand in the presence of a holy God because of Jesus.

ix) In the Old Testament, righteousness came only through the sacrifices made in the temple...it’s the only way people could be right with God. And that was only once per year!

x) For Christians, we know that Jesus is that ultimate sacrifice for all time. And so, you’ve trusted in Jesus for salvation – to be made righteous in God’s eyes. And righteousness (this right-standing before God) comes only through Jesus and his sacrifice and not what we DO and HAVE DONE...

xi) And even though that’s awesome news, we sometimes forget that, don’t we? We sometimes make it about what we’re doing in the church, or doing in our personal lives.

xii) And so Luke is telling us that Jesus is speaking to those who sometimes forget that it’s about God and make it about themselves.

- xiii) And we confuse a right-standing before God because of what Jesus did with a right-standing before God and others because of what we do.
- xiv) And this causes some (us) to regard others with contempt.
- xv) And this makes sense because if we think we're all that, and are good enough because of what we've done (sort of ignoring what Jesus did for us), then why wouldn't we look at the things other people have either done or NOT done, and regard them with disdain? Look at them as inferior? Look down on them?
- xvi) Because of what we've done, we think we are right with God...and because of what we've done, we think we are better than others...
- xvii) Luke and Jesus clearly link these two attitudes together because they were so prevalent in their culture, and are so prevalent in our culture and in our human nature. And Jesus is addressing them head-on in this parable...
- xviii) Let's see what Jesus has to say...

**b) Read verse 18:10**

- i) Two men...one a religious leader, someone who upholds the law, someone the listeners would say is devout – a Pharisee.
- ii) The other one, a scoundrel, a thief, a cheat and a traitor.
- iii) Both these men were Jewish...the Pharisee, working for the Temple – for God, leading the Jewish people in their religion. The tax collector, working for the Romans, collecting taxes FOR the Romans FROM the Jews. And this usually consisted of skimming some extra off the top for them to keep.
- iv) And yet, they both were doing what they believed to be the right thing at that moment...going to the Temple to pray, just as God asks. To worship and give thanks to God.
- v) The basis for their actions was to DO what God asks.
- vi) No matter who we are, or where we come from, we all have the potential to do the next right thing in the eyes of God.

vii) The problems come when our motivations are wrong, and as Jesus gives more details about these two men, it becomes clear whose motivations are pure and whose are trusting in themselves for righteousness. And whose attitude leads to contempt for the other.

**c) Read verses 18:11-12**

i) This Pharisee was standing by himself. Was he an introvert? Something you'll find out about me is that I'm an introvert by nature...I love being alone sometimes. Was this guy an introvert?

ii) Did he not like other people?

iii) Chances are, Jesus places this Pharisee by himself in this story to underline the fact that this religious leader wanted to maintain his purity. If he were to touch someone who was ritually unclean, he would no longer be pure and would have to go through a long purification process.

iv) "Man, I don't want to get too close to any of those UNCLEAN people...it would ruin my day."

v) He was standing off to let everyone know he was a Pharisee...that he was pure.

vi) And this guy's prayer was like, "God (good start, right?), I thank you (not bad – remember gratitude is important to our faith) thank you THAT I AM NOT LIKE OTHER PEOPLE..."

vii) Literally, he prayed, God, thank you that I'm not like the rest of humanity. Thank you that I'm better than everyone else.

viii) And then he lists off the people for which he is thankful that he's NOT LIKE: thieves – people who steal other people's stuff. And rogues – people who do evil things. Adulterers – married people who are morally corrupt and have sexual relations with people other than their spouse.

ix) I mean, this list is harsh and seemingly getting more and more harsh as we go, from a cultural standpoint.

x) And then he finally gets to the end of his list, and is like running out of people to dislike, and I can just see him frantically looking around the Temple trying to find that worst person ever and he catches sight of the

tax collector in the corner and says, “or even like that tax collector.”  
“God thank you that I’m not like THAT GUY!”

- xi) And he points the finger and condemns this man who is at the Temple, of the same culture, doing the same thing he’s doing...sort of.
- xii) And the Pharisee goes on to boast about his fasting and tithing. And the implication is that these things that he does are what makes him righteous. His tithing and his fasting are what sets him apart from the rest of humanity...for which he is thankful.
- xiii) Now, fasting and tithing are fruitful spiritual disciplines. Fasting allows us to temporarily take away any dependence in things of this world and focus our dependence on God. Tithing acknowledges that God is the owner and author of everything we have, and we are giving just a portion back to Him for his purposes.
- xiv) But those powerful spiritual disciplines can also be abused by thinking that it’s all up to us...that we are more spiritual than others. And when we fast, or pray, or give to the church, and those things come with strings attached or we are doing those things to prove to others that we are more holy, then they are done in vain.
- xv) And the end result of doing those things with misguided motivations is that it cuts us off from God, and if you’ve been around the church long enough, you know that it can cut us off from the church as well.
- xvi) Jesus tells us that this Pharisee was misguided. He was the one who Jesus said was trusting in himself that he was righteous, and had contempt for other people – all because of what he had done.
- xvii) But then Jesus shifts the focus to the tax collector, standing in the corner...

**d) Read verse 18:13**

- i) The typical prayer position in the early church was standing with head raised and hands up. (we should try that more often)
- ii) But this tax collector, humbling himself before God, wouldn’t even look up to heaven. He was standing as far away from people as he could (sort of like all of you in the back row, I suppose)...trying not to get too close to the inner court...beating his breast in repentance and humility, “God

(notice that Jesus has him start the prayer in the same way), be merciful to me, a sinner.” And those words come directly from Psalm 51...

- iii) With his body language and his testimony, this unlikely man of righteousness becomes the hero of the story.
- iv) The Pharisee couldn't say enough things about himself that were good, and this guy could only call himself a sinner.
- v) The Pharisee asked nothing of God because he believed that he was not a sinner and didn't need anything from God...the tax collector boasted nothing before God because he knew he was a sinner.
- vi) And then Jesus gives us the moral of the story...

**e) Read verse 18:14**

- i) Notice the words ALL here...ALL who exalt themselves...ALL who humble themselves...
- ii) And ALL means ALL...the disciples, the Pharisees, the people, you, and me....
- iii) ALL who humble themselves before the Lord will find themselves in that right relationships with God and with others...

**3) Application**

- a) So how do we take this with us? Let me give us three pitfalls to avoid as we move out into the world today...three things this parable teaches us about us.
- b) The first pitfall is *to trust ourselves more than we trust in God*. Whenever tough situations come...difficult times...our first response is to work harder to find a solution.
- c) And sometimes we do it! Sometimes we muscle it out.
- d) The Pharisee thought that everything HE was doing was what made the righteous difference in his life. Yet, the tax collector was the one that walked away justified, redeemed, and made whole.
- e) Not because of something he did, like fasting or giving 10%, but because he trusted in God for mercy and forgiveness. His relationship with God was restored through his acknowledgment of his sin.

- f) The second thing is our *failure to see the image of God in the people around us*. Step into a crowded room, and we tend to see differences — different skin colors, hairstyles, tattoos, piercings, body shapes and makeup choices.
- g) Some of these differences repel us and we step back, just like the Pharisee moved away from the crowd, not wanting to associate with unclean people.
- h) But, in reality, these differences are all superficial, and most don't reflect the true nature of a person. The really deep truth about a crowd of people is that they are all children of God, created in the image and likeness of God. That is what we ought to be looking at.
- i) When we trust in God and see His image in people around us, not only is our relationship with Him restored, but our relationship with others is as well.
- j) And our last pitfall is when *we are not honest with God* — or honest with ourselves — about our need for forgiveness. The tax collector saw himself clearly, and he confessed his sinfulness.
- k) And all of this begs the question: HOW do I get to a place where I trust God, see the image of God in others, and recognize my own need for forgiveness? How can I have faith like THAT GUY...the tax collector?
- l) Because, really, our ability and willingness to humble ourselves before God, knowing that we are sinners in need of grace, has a direct impact on our ability and willingness to be merciful to those around us, who are also sinners in need of grace.
- m) From our parable last week about persistent and consistent prayer, and this parable about humility and repentance, the answer is simple.
- n) Prayer. “God, please show your mercy and grace to me today because I am a sinner in need. Help me.”
- o) If you're willing to pray that prayer every morning, you'll begin to trust God more, you'll look at yourself more honestly and at others with more compassion. Your relationship with God will be deeper and so will your willingness to truly love those around you with a heart beating with God's heartbeat.
- p) Let's pray...