



# THE PARABLES OF JESUS

## SESSION 3

### *Parable of the Pharisee & the Tax Collector: **Leaders** Guide*

## WELCOME

To review – Jesus told parables as an invitation to see Him/ to know Him for who He really is – not as we perceive Him or hope Him to be. If you remember from our previous weeks, we said that parables were **simple** in detail, **common** in image and **indirect** with a message. And, here's the thing – people continued to come to Him to be taught by Him and to hear the authority that He taught. They were consumed with getting to know Jesus.

And, honestly, that's why we're studying the parables. We too want to be consumed with getting to know Jesus. In getting to know Jesus, we get to know what the Father is like, what to expect of Him, and how to come to God through Jesus His Son.

**Hebrews 11:6** tells us:

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

We learn two things about approaching God from this Scripture:

- We learn faith in His existence
- And, we learn that He rewards those who seek Him.

**Hebrews 11:6** is **Luke 18**. The chapter features five people who want to draw near to God. In each case, they come to Jesus with a question, a need or a desire. In **verse 9**, the Lord tells another parable to **“some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous”** – this is our parable today. We will be covering the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. The Parable of The Pharisee and The Tax Collector starts off as a classic good guy vs. bad guy story but ends up with a twisty ending.

## SCRIPTURE

Have someone in the group look up and read **Luke 18:9-10**

## SET THE STAGE

Ok, we won't spend much time on this but if you've got any background in church then you've heard stories about Pharisees and Tax Collectors.

- **The Pharisees** are a bit of an instigator in the New Testament [*and there are reasons why...check out **John 11:45-48** with an emphasis on **verse 48!***] BUT they are also looked upon as being righteous [*Look at **Matthew 5:20**, Jesus also gives us a little insight into the righteousness of the Pharisees.*]

- **Tax collectors** were normally Jewish citizens that went to work for the oppressive Roman empire. The Romans taxed the Jewish people heavily, and the tax collectors were allowed to tax even more and basically skim off the top. These guys were very rich and they were absolutely hated by the Jewish people because of the left their Jewish heritage and made lots of money by over-taxing the people.

In his gospel, Luke seems to treat tax collectors much different than the other 3 gospels. In fact, he takes the time to build his Gospel around them. They are mentioned about **6 times in the book of Luke\*** and every single time they are mentioned positively. And this is amazing considering how much tax collectors were hated. Everyone hated them...and knowing how much they were charging in taxes – *the tax collectors probably hated themselves*. But – here’s the thing – Jesus did not hate them, and Luke seems to recognize this in His writings.

- **[Homework for later Luke 3:12-13; Luke 5:27-32; Luke 7:33-35; Luke 15:1-7; Luke 18:9-14; and, Luke 19:1-10]**

So, we have a Pharisee and a Tax Collector AND Jesus told this parable **“to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt...”**

## QUESTIONS

**Who did Jesus target this parable’s teaching towards [Luke 18:9]?**

- Why did Jesus tell the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector?
- Do you think this problem of self-righteous people is as much a problem today as back then? Explain.

**In what areas of life do you ‘have confidence in yourself?’ Is this good or bad in light of Luke 18:9?**

- Is it okay to be better than others? How can we grow in righteousness without becoming self-righteous?

**Many people who have a religion or philosophy are self-righteous. They think their ways are better than others and so as a result ignore God and despise others. This is also true sometimes of those who profess to be a Christian.**

- Do you know of any such people?
- How do you know you are not like this?

## SCRIPTURE

**Have someone in the group look up and read Luke 18:11-14**

Pharisees were righteous. Everyone knew that. The Scripture mentions that the Pharisee, “is standing by himself,” and he’s praying. He is not standing up in the middle of everyone. There’s no grandstanding *[as I have often been taught]*. He is not praying loud enough for everyone to hear him but he is off by himself. AND, he’s praying a God-centered prayer. As the man said of himself, “I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.” As far as we can tell, this man did everything that was expected of him and more. He embraced his faith fully. His life was genuinely shaped by what he believed.

Now, the tax collector’s prayer is very different.

The tax collector offers nothing! He doesn't thank God for anything. He doesn't say, "Well, at least I've done this or that well or ok." While he's hitting himself, saying, "**be merciful to me, a sinner.**" God, You're my only hope!

Now notice something else – there is a comma behind the word "justified." Now, if there were a period after that we would all go, "Oh how great is that! The tax collector got saved!" But, there's not a period – there's a comma. And this is the terrifying part, because He finishes His thought right after the comma, "rather than the other." Which means that the tax collector with his prayer of "**be merciful to me, a sinner,**" has right standing before God – while the Pharisee [*who gives God all credit for his behavior, his life and his money*] is said here by Jesus to NOT be justified – to not be accepted and to not be forgiven.

The reason the Pharisee's prayer is a problem is because he is counting on all of his works of "righteousness" [*the behavior, his life, his money*] as his means of salvation – and that's the problem with his prayer. The tax collector recognizes that he is a sinner and is counting on the mercy of God for his salvation.

## QUESTIONS

**What title do you give to this parable?**

- *Self-Trust is Misplaced*
- *You Can't be Good Enough*
- *Pride and Humility*
- *How Not to Pray*
- *God's Road to Exaltation*
- *Measuring by the Wrong Standard*

**Compare and contrast the attitudes of the Pharisee and tax collector in this parable.**

- Who would be examples of "Pharisees" and "tax collectors" in our society today?

**What motivated the Pharisee to pray? [Luke 18:11]**

- Why do you think the Pharisee was confident in his own righteousness? [Luke 18:11-12]
- How many times does the Pharisee use the word 'I' in **verse 11-12**? What does this reveal?

**Why did the tax collector stand at a distance? [Luke 18:13]**

- What prompted the tax collector to pray? [Luke 18:13]
- How did the tax collector pray? [Luke 18:13]

**Why do you think Jesus used the example of a tax collector vs a Pharisee as the picture of humility?**

- Define humility in your own words. Who is someone in your life who has embodied humility well?
- How might First Baptist Portland look different if we increased in humility?

**Who returned home justified?**

- Be honest: Which guy are you most like—the Pharisee or the Tax Collector? Why?
- Which one of these two guys would most likely be accepted here at First Baptist Portland? Why?

## CONCLUSION

The parables we will be discussing this spring are:

- ***The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant - Matthew 18:21-35***
- ***The Parable of the Prodigal Son - Luke 15:1-3, 11-32***
- ***The Parable of the Talents - Matthew 25:14-30***
- ***The Parable of the Ten Virgins - Matthew 25:1-13***
- ***And, the Parable of the Good Samaritan - Luke 10:25-37***

I would encourage you to read ahead and study these parables in the days and weeks ahead. I am excited to see where this study leads us as a group and individually in understanding the teachings of our Lord, Jesus Christ.