

CORE SEMINAR
Spring 2024
The Parables of Jesus
Course 3: The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

ICE BREAKER

Choose an ice breaker from the *Spring Community Group Guide* or go to www.fbcportland.org/icebreakers to select an ice breaker to ask your group.

- Spend about 5 minutes discussing the question – this is a great way to “warm up” your group.

INTRODUCTION

Ok guys! We’ve made it to **Week 3!**

Now – just 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:

1. We learn faith in His existence
2. 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 four of the five cases, we see Jesus reward these seekers.

- In **verse 1** we see that Jesus tells a parable to “them” – meaning His disciples.
- In **verse 9**, the Lord tells another parable to “some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous” – **this is our parable today.**
- In **verse 15**, we see a group of parents bringing their kids to see Jesus and the disciples.
- In **verse 18**, we see “a ruler” approach Jesus with a question.
- In **verse 31**, He addresses the disciples once again.
- And, in **verse 35**, we see a blind man approach Jesus.

Today we will be in **Luke 18:9-14**. 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.

Let's Pray and we'll get started...

PRAYER

SET THE STAGE FOR THE PARABLE OF PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

Have someone in your group read Luke 18:9-10

⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:

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?

¹⁰ **“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.”**

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.

Pharisee:

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.*]

Let's look at the Tax Collectors in the Gospels

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.

- And by the way, one of Jesus' disciples – Matthew – was a tax collector. **What do you think “community” was like in their small group with the understanding of what Matthew did for a living**

Jesus was known to eat with tax collectors [**Zacchaeus and Matthew's friends**], inviting the anger of the religious elites – namely the Pharisees. He told the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin [*won't get to these*] and the two lost sons [*will get to this one*] to those who grumbled because – again – **Jesus kept company with tax collectors and other sinners**. Let's see how the 4 Gospels treat tax collectors:

- **Mark** spends a little bit of time [*specifically, **Mark 2***] on the calling of Levi [*Matthew*] and the dinner in his house, but that's pretty much all of the attention that tax collectors get in his Gospel account.
- **Matthew** mentions tax collectors more often, but the picture remains incomplete. And honestly, this isn't a surprise – his gospel was written to a Jewish audience. He probably didn't want to relive the ridicule he faced – and definitely didn't want to spend a lot of time reminding his audience of the “dreaded tax collector.”
- **John** doesn't really mention them at all.

- **Luke**, however, takes the time to build his Gospel around them. They are mentioned about 6 times in the book of Luke [**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**] **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.

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...**”

Have someone in your group read Luke 18:11-14

¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

So, let’s stop for a moment and look at the first part of this prayer – and honestly there’s a couple of things I haven’t noticed before.

1. 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.
2. And, two, his prayer is very theocentric [having God as a central focus]. It’s a God-centered prayer. **‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.** There’s nothing wrong with this prayer. Here is all the Pharisee is saying, "If it was not for You, who knows what I would be?"
 - a. Now who wouldn’t pray this prayer?
 - b. Who wouldn’t say:
 - i. “If God had not intervened in my life – at the moment He did – who knows what I would have become!
 - ii. Who knows what I would be into right now!
 - iii. Who knows what I would be capable of – if God had not intervened and saved me!

¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

Pharisees were righteous. Everyone knew that. As the man said of himself, "I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." What's wrong with that? Nothing. 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. When it came to status before God—the

question of righteousness—this man had done everything he was supposed to do. The staff at FBC won't have to do a series on prayer or tithing with this guy!

Now, look at what happens. The tax collector's prayer is very different.

¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

So, get this picture in your head – the tax collector is not saying “I thank You, God” for anything is he?

- He doesn't thank God for anything.
- He doesn't say, “Well, at least I've done this or that well or ok.”

He offers nothing – while he's hitting himself, saying, “be merciful to me, a sinner.” God, You're my only hope!

Now, the next line is terrifying -

¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

In **verse 14**, Jesus tells us that the tax collector – with his prayer – is justified [*in right standing before God*]. God is not going to condemn this man now. He has right standing – he is accepted and welcomed in the presence of God.

Now, put these two images of “righteousness” beside each other.

- One is a Pharisee who did everything he was supposed to do in order to gain right standing in God's eyes.
- The other is a tax collector, whose life was a complete repudiation of everything God would ask him to do.
- Could both be justified?

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.

QUESTION: What title do you give to this parable?

- *Self-Trust is Misplaced*
- *You Can’t be Good Enough*
- *Repentance Precedes Justification*
- *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]

What was the tax collector humble about?

- 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?
- Have someone read **Psalm 18:27, Psalm 25:9, Psalm 147:6, Psalm 149:4, and Proverbs 3:34**. What do we learn about the Lord and how he views humility from these verses?

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?**