Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Who Can Be Right With God? Part 1
Scripture: Luke 18:9-14
Code: 42-228

Just before we look specifically at the passage of Scripture before us, I just want to let you know that this is a portion of Scripture that I have been waiting for all my life, really, to preach on. As you know, going through books of the New Testament the way we do, you get there once and that's it and you have to wait until it shows up. But I have referred to this text of Scripture thousands of times in my ministry, it is such a profound text theologically, spiritually. It has such sweeping implications and yet it is at the same time so basic and so simple. It is that parable that our Lord tells in Luke chapter 18 starting at verse 9, and what I want to do in unfolding this is take my time so that we understand it fully and so that we understand its implications fully. And in order to build the background historically that makes this sensible to us and rich, it's going to take a little bit of time.

It is an amazing story that our Lord tells for its profundity, as is so often the case, with simple words. So let's turn to Luke chapter 18 and look at verses 9 through 14...Luke chapter 18, verses 9 through 14.

"And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and viewed others with contempt. Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax gatherer. The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I'm not like other people, swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax gatherer. I fast twice a week. I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax gatherer standing some distance away was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven but was beating his breast saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner.' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

As is true of so many of our Lord's story, they are counterintuitive. But not just counterintuitive, really outrageous, shameful by all existing religious standards. And this is one that fits into the category of an outrageous and shameful story for in this story Jesus describes the unrighteous man as the one who was right with God and the righteous man as the one who was not. This is the reverse of everything the Jews believed, everything their religion at the time of our Lord taught them, it is a shameful story, it is an outrageous story, it is an idea that has no place in their theology. It is another reason to reject Jesus. To say that a self-confessed wicked man left the temple ground justified rather than a self-confessed righteous man is to completely overturn religious thinking. But that's exactly what Jesus said.

Why this parable at this time in Luke's gospel? Do you remember what his subject is? Since the twentieth verse of chapter 17 all the way to the end to verse 37 and the first 8 verses of chapter 18 He has been talking about the coming of the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. And basically we have looked at the Kingdom and we have come to understand that the Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom, that is Christ reigns and rules in the hearts of those who put their trust in Him. He will return one day to establish a literal, physical, material, earthly Kingdom and after that thousand year Kingdom will establish the new heavens and the new earth which is the eternal Kingdom. He reigns then over a spiritual Kingdom, He will reign over an earthly Kingdom and reign forever an eternal Kingdom. Those who are in the spiritual Kingdom will be in the earthly Kingdom and in the eternal Kingdom.

Now we've been looking at those great realities. The first time He came He came to do the work that made it possible for us to be in His Kingdom...spiritual, millennial and eternal. When He returns, He will come to judge the ungodly and to establish that earthly Kingdom and that eternal Kingdom.

Now all this talk about the Kingdom then raises a very basic question...how does one get into this Kingdom? How is one made right with God? How is one reconciled to God? That is the big, big question and that is the question our Lord answers in this simple story. How can a person be right with God? This is not a new question, this is a question that plagued and haunted the people of the earliest biblical era. Back in the book of Job written in the patriarchal period, Job chapter 9 verse 1, Job answered in truth, "I know that this is so but how can a man be right with God?" How can we be righteous before God? How can we be justified before God? How can it be?

And there are some compelling reasons why the question is not easy to answer. It is not easy to answer because we know for certain that no person, no one of us can on our own achieve this righteousness and they understood if they understood the Old Testament at all that this is a biblical truth. There was no way that a sinner could be righteous on his own for the Scripture says the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked and the prophet also said that all our righteousness is as filthy rags. The dilemma then is if we are sinful and God demands righteousness, how can a man be right with God? How can we be justified?

Here's the story and verse 14 says, "This man went down to his house justified." That is the most important issue that will ever face any human whoever walks on this planet and has a reasonable thought. Who is right with God and how? That's the question. And the answer is really stunning and shocking. Remember the Jews knew God to be righteous, they knew God to be holy. They knew the book of Leviticus said, "Be ye holy for I am holy," again and again and again and again and again. They knew that. And they understood the question of Job, how can a man be right with God? And that question, frankly, in the book of Job comes up on a number of occasions. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Job verse 4, "How then can a man be just with God? How can he be clean who is born of woman?" If you're human, you're dirty. If you're human, you're sinful. How can you be right with God?

That was the compelling question in the oldest spiritual dialogue recorded in Scripture, the book of Job. And the psalmist, of course, reiterated what they knew very well, Psalm 143 and verse 2, "In Thy sight, no man living is righteous." Now that's the dilemma. God is absolutely righteous and holy. God says you must be righteous and holy, "Be ye holy for I am holy," and yet all our righteousness is filthy rags and no living person is righteous. That's a big problem. That is the dilemma of all dilemmas. That is the issue of all issues that compels every human heart, the answer to which determines every person's everlasting destiny.

The word justified, you look at that word as a Christian who probably knows the book of Romans and you say, "I understand that word," and you give me a speech on forensic righteousness imputed to the sinner through faith in Jesus Christ, and that's exactly correct. But these people hadn't read Romans. How did they understand the word justified? They understood it exactly the way you understand it, it means to be just, that is guiltless. It means to be right before the judge, that is right before God. The common meaning of this word, *dikaioo*and even the Hebrew related word means to be guiltless. It is to accept someone as righteous, to acquit them, to clear their name so that one stands before God approved and accepted and that's exactly what our Lord said about this tax gatherer. God accepted him and rejected the Pharisee. Stunning, stunning truth.

How can it be? How can it happen? Well they should have known their Old Testament well enough to know Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness." They should have known what Paul points out in Romans 4 that Abraham was justified by faith. They also should have known what Isaiah said in Isaiah chapter 43 where...chapter 53, I'm sorry, that great chapter on the Messiah, listen to what Isaiah writes. "My servant, the righteous one, Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, will justify the many...how?...He will bear their iniquities," Isaiah 53:11. They should have known that the only way that anybody could be righteous with God would be to be perfectly holy because that's what God demanded throughout the book of Leviticus. And the only way that could happen would be if God imputed His righteousness to them by faith and the only way God could do that is if there was a suitable sacrifice to bear the punishment, the just punishment His Law demanded in place of the sinner. All the pieces are there throughout the Old Testament. They should have remembered "Blessed is the one to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity." They should have understood the whole sacrificial system. Every time there was a sacrifice and they were made every day, every single day, this was a symbol of substitutionary death that the violation of the Law required. Death and either you die, or an innocent substitute dies in your place...all of those sacrifices pointed to the one final perfect Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. It's all there in the Old Testament. They had the bits and pieces. They knew they needed to be right with God.

But how? By the time you get to the life of Jesus, they've missed it all together. They don't even understand that the Messiah must suffer and die. They've lost complete sight of the meaning of the whole sacrificial system. They don't even understand Isaiah 53 at all. And they have decided what the rest of the world has decided, that you get to God by being good. That's how you get there. You

please God, you satisfy God, you achieve reconciliation with God, you get into His Kingdom, you gain heaven by being good, particularly being religiously good. There's no more important question for anybody to answer than the question, "How do I reconcile with God?" How can I be made right with God? How can I be acceptable to God? How is it that God will let me in His Kingdom and into His eternal heaven? That's the most compelling question. And this simple story, isn't it amazing?, simple story, verses 10 through 14, answers that question with amazing profundity, simplicity and clarity. And you might think that that kind of a question could lead to the most convoluted, complex, massive discussion of theology and religion ever. Somebody might say, "Well huh...you're talking about how to get to God, how to be right with God, how to make it to heaven. There are so many answers to that question. We'd have to go through every religion on the planet to cover all that ground. And we'd have to sort through all of that and decide is it this, is it that, what part of this, what part of that, what are the elements and components that are universal to religion that suit this kind of thing?"

No, it's not complicated, it's not complex, it's just this simple. You want to know how simple it is? Here's how simple it is. Either you can make yourself right before God or you can't. Is that simple enough? There are no more options than that. Either you can achieve righteousness that satisfies what God requires, or you can't. It's not complicated. You are either the means of your own justification, or you are not. You either do it actively or it is done for you, passive. That's it. That is the simple division of all religion on the planet. It is either a religion of human achievement or it is the truth, the religion of divine accomplishment. Every religion that's ever existed in the world apart from the true one revealed in Scripture is a system of human achievement, you get to God by being good, morally good, religiously good, ceremonially, ritually, religiously and morally. The complex of that makes you acceptable to God. And even people who aren't religious say nowadays that they're spiritual and they're really too good for God to send them to hell. That means they're good enough for God to take them into His heaven. I don't care what the name of the religion is, whether it's a massive world religion, or whether it's a private personal little concocted religion which is so popular today, if it has in it the idea that you get to God by being good, it is a damnable lie. In fact, it is a part of THE big lie that dominates human history.

Let me help you to understand that. To give you a New Testament statement of the standard to which God requires, you only need to listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:48, here it comes. "Therefore you are to be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." Jesus is reiterating Leviticus, "Be holy for I am holy." What is the divine standard? Absolute perfection. The Bible says if you break the Law in one place, you've shattered all of it. Jesus went on to even go so far as to say, "And it isn't just the external Law that must be obeyed, it also involves attitudes of the heart so that if you lust, you've violated the law of adultery, and if you hate, you've violated the law of murder," etc., etc. You have to be as perfect as God. That's absolute holiness.

Well if that's the standard, what hope is there for anyone? What hope is there for anyone? And that was the very question on the disciples mind in Matthew 19. A rich young ruler comes to Jesus and

Jesus says to him, you need to keep the Law. He says, Oh, I've done that. Kept the Law from my youth up, all those things have I kept. And he went away from a conversation with Jesus that started with a question...what do I do to gain eternal life?...and he went away without eternal life, he walked away from that conversation because he thought he was perfect. He didn't understand the standard at all. And the disciples looked at that conversation and they also were pretty impressed with the guy, they were very impressed with him. He was probably a Pharisee cause he was a ruler of a synagogue. And the response of the disciples is this, who then can be saved? If a fastidious Pharisee who gets elected to be the leader of the synagogue isn't in the Kingdom, who can be saved? And Jesus responds by saying this, "With men it is impossible...impossible, but with God...different story...all things are possible."

So what you have in this story is a division of the only two religions that exist...the religion of self-....of human achievement, self-achievement, and the religion of divine accomplishment. And the Pharisee is self-righteous, aloof, contemptuous, standing as near as he can to the holy place without touching any of the people who would contaminate him in his mind. He seeks no mercy, seeks no grace, seeks no forgiveness, wants no sympathy. He is thankful that he is not unrighteous. Self-exalted he goes away unjustified.

And the other character is the tax collector...sinful outcast, object of contempt, guilty, standing far away as he feels so unclean and unwanted, seeking mercy, desperately needing grace, distraught that he is not righteous. He goes home justified. He's humble so he ends up being exalted.

Powerful story. Two men, two postures, two prayers, two results and it will take two weeks. Perfect fit. You know, I hate to tell a story over two weeks, I really do. But what am I going to do? You have to understand the story.

Now we're going to break it down. Point number one, the comprehensive audience. I want you to see the audience as comprehensive because it covers everybody...everybody outside those in the true faith. It's a very comprehensive audience to the whom the story is directed, verse 9, and He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and viewed others with contempt. So immediately you get the target audience here. He spoke this parable, that's how it begins...there is no time indicator here, there is no transitional statement here so we don't know exactly whether or not Jesus said this on the same occasion. He was talking about the Kingdom, perhaps He did, perhaps He didn't, but certainly in Luke's inspired order of the text, this is the right discussion because we've just been talking about the Kingdom and that Jesus is coming and you must be ready for His coming. And when He comes, there's going to be separation and there's going to be the death of the ungodly and carcasses are going to be everywhere. You want to be ready for the coming King, you want to be in His Kingdom. And so that begs the question...how does one enter the Kingdom, who is in the Kingdom and why? And so the parable fits in the flow of thought.

Now His audience is certain ones...certain ones. Literally whoever the ones, in the Greek, whoever the ones. Very, very broad, anybody and everybody who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. That's everybody who has any inkling at all about going to heaven based on works, religious ones and/or moral ones. But in particular who did He have in mind? Who were the real leaders of this religion in Israel of trusting in yourself that you were righteous? The Pharisees, the scribes. Go back to chapter 16 verse 14, "The Pharisees...says Jesus, first of all it says Luke, the Pharisees who were lovers of money were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him and He said to them...and here are the words of Jesus, 'You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men. You make yourselves righteous in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts. That which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.'"

So the Pharisees were the great architects of a system of self-righteousness that dominated life in Israel. They had the greatest influence on a populous because they had power in the local synagogues everywhere which were basically ruled by their theology and even local Pharisees. And so the people believed that trusting in yourself to become righteous was the way you gained a place in the Kingdom of God and the way you would eventually get to heaven. The benchmark of their system, self-confidence in one's ability to achieve righteousness by their own power and works. How in the world could they get to that point from the Old Testament? What did they do with the heart being deceitful above all things and desperately wicked? What did they do with that our works are nothing more than filthy rags? What did they do with the fact, Psalm 143:2, that no one can live righteously before God? What did they do with all of that? Conveniently setting it aside in sinful pride, trusting in their own righteousness. These are the Pharisees for sure, these are the people who followed the Pharisees. But these are also all the people of all time who have developed any kind of self-styled approach to God in which they believe they have the power to live a life that satisfies God, that somehow they are good enough to be acceptable to God, into His Kingdom, into His goodness and into His heaven. These are all the people in the religion of human achievement. Basically that's how people think in the world. You can go do the man in the street thing, walk up and down the street, start a conversation with anybody and ask somebody...how do you get to heaven? How do you get reconciled to God? How do you please God? How do you get into the Kingdom of God?

Well, you need to be good. You need to do good. And if you follow that up, rare that you'll ever find anybody who will say anything other than...I think I'm good enough, I...I don't do this. They can always think of some things they haven't done qualifying themself at the lowest level by comparing themselves with other mass murderers and assorted people. Now this is the dominant lie, as you know, in the world, the most commonly believed damning lie that you can be good enough to go to heaven if you're just moral enough and religious enough. But remember, the standard is absolute perfection, be holy as I am holy. You have to be as good as God and God is goodness personified in perfection eternally.

But the people listening to Jesus this day were...were imbedded in the self-righteous religious system of the Pharisees. This is what the Pharisees claimed for themselves. This is what they taught. This is what they advocated. And this is what the people bought into. One of the leading victims of this big lie is none other than the Apostle Paul who gives his own testimony in Philippians chapter 3. He says, "If anybody has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more." You want to talk about fleshly achievement? You want to talk about how good a man can be in himself? Listen to this. "Circumcised the eighth day," I followed that Old Testament prescription, "of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin," one of the nobler of the tribes. "A Hebrew of Hebrews," meaning I kept all the traditions. "As to the Law, a Pharisee, the most fastidious and zealous of all law keepers, as to zeal, so passionate about his religion that he persecuted the church." and then the pinnacle, "As to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless." There wasn't anybody who knew me on the outside who could point to anything in my life that was a violation of the Law visible to them. I walked the walk. I toed the mark." He lived that life, trusting in yourself that you can be righteous. They fasted all the time, we'll see that. They prayed. They abstained. They tithed. They memorized Scripture. They invented laws just to keep them. Anything and everything to create an appearance of holiness. In spite of all that, the first great sermon the New Testament and some ways THE great sermon of the gospels....

The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus at the beginning of that sermon says this, Matthew 5:20, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven." You won't be in it spiritually, you won't be in it millenially, and you won't be in it eternally either, unless you have a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. Nobody could comprehend that. What are you talking about? They were the personification of human righteousness. How could anybody surpass that?

It was the sixteenth century and it was Germany and there was a monk named Martin Luther. He sat in the tower of the Black Cloister, called that because they wore black, Wittenberg, meditating on the perfect righteousness of God. He was the most scrupulous of monks. When you read the biographies of Luther, it is amazing how scrupulous he was, attention to detail in his life. He confessed his sins multiple hours per day. He sought forgiveness for the minutest of sins. He realized, however, that with all this effort as he looked at the standard of perfect righteousness, it was utterly and absolutely unattainable because he knew his own heart. In fact, he concluded that divine righteousness is unrelenting, unforgiving, avenging. It is a kind of wrath. He believed his state was hopeless. He had been told as a child that God is full of vengeance, that Jesus sits on a rainbow pouring out vengeance and the only hope you'll ever have to be saved is to go to Mary. And when he understood that the righteousness of God was perfection and that that's what God required, it made him angry. This is what he said. "The expression 'the righteousness of God' was like a thunderbolt in my heart. I hated Paul with all my heart." He hated Paul because Paul wrote in Romans about the righteousness of God. "Only...he said...when I read these words 'the just shall live by faith,' only then did I find relief."

And he was helped by reading Augustine. "When I learned that the righteousness of God is His mercy and that He makes us righteous through it, a remedy was offered to me in my affliction."

Well the Pharisees never did come to that discovery. The people hadn't come to that discovery and the world doesn't come to that discovery. The world basically is on the trail to God of being good. The Pharisees were sickeningly self-righteous, or as Walter Lefield(?) says, "They are obnoxiously self-righteous," and that's why you have a further description of them at the end of verse 9. Not only did they trust in themselves that they were righteous, but they viewed others with contempt. They viewed others with contempt. Contempt is the worst scorn that you can heap on somebody. In Luke 23:11 the only two times this word is used in the gospels, once here in 18 and once again in 23:11, Herod with his soldiers after treating Jesus with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. Scorn, ridicule, mockery, sarcasm, the lowest form and the most biting form of derision...the Pharisees were that way. They looked at anybody below them outside their group with contempt. The word, I think, is interesting enough to kind of breakdown, *exoutheneo*. It comes from two words, as do many Greek terms, many of the verbs combining a preposition at the beginning. *Ek*, out of, *ouden*, not...not even, not even anything, the nobodies, the nothings, the non-existence. They viewed them as if they didn't exist. By the way, that same word is used by Peter in Acts 4 when he preached a sermon, and he said this about Jesus, "He is the stone which the builders rejected." That's the same verb. Jesus was treated as if He was nothing, absolutely nothing. By the way, the word is also used in 1 Corinthians 1 where the Lord has chosen the base things and the despised, the nothings and the nobodies God has chosen.

So, there's in this self-righteousness, in this pride, a contempt for anybody beneath you. The Jews, the law keepers were called the*habareim(?)* and the lawbreakers were called the *umharits(???),*the low lifes. And in the eyes of the Pharisee, he couldn't get near to anybody who was an *umharits*. That was an absolutely unthinkable thing for him to do. Kenneth Bailey writes, "In the eyes of a strict Pharisee, the most obvious candidate for the classification for *umharits*would be a tax collector. But there was a particular kind of uncleanness that was contracted by sitting, riding, or even leaning against something unclean, this uncleanness was called *midras*(?) uncleanness and for Pharisees, he writes, "The clothes of an *umharits*count as suffering *midras*uncleanness." They didn't get near any of the low lifes and the riff-raffs that they disdained...remember I told you earlier, not even so much as to teach them the Law of God.

And so here we have these two men. And they are at extreme poles. And they're going to be the ones that convey the message Jesus wants to convey to the people who think they can be good enough to get to heaven on their own. The audience is really universal, a comprehensive audience. Second point, the contrasting analogy...the contrasting analogy. And at least we'll look at the story and get started into it. Verse 10, "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax gatherer. The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I'm not like other people, swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax gatherer. I fast twice a week. I pay

tithes of all that I get." We'll stop there.

It's going to be painful just to have to live with this guy for a week. Humph.... What's the scene here? Two men went up to the temple to pray. That happened twice a day, basically, every day...9 A.M., 3 P.M., morning and evening sacrifice prescribed for the burnt offering which was laid out in the first chapter of Leviticus. They were to go up and make an animal sacrifice, a blood sacrifice as a symbol of atonement. That was a very, very important thing. They were very, very fastidious people who made sure they showed up at 9 A.M. and at 3 P.M. every day, particularly Pharisees who were in the proximity and could do that. Now the crowd would go up the steps at the prescribed time. The sacrifices would be offered on the altar. Following the sacrifices which would symbolically open the way to God because atonement had been made, incense would be burned symbolizing prayer. Now because atonement has been made, prayers can be offered...and prayers would be offered. There would come a priestly benediction upon the people who were faithful enough to be there as well, and that would be the typical scene. When it says they went up to the temple to pray, pray would embody all the worship, all of the activities that went on. The temple, according to Matthew 21:13 by the mouth of Jesus Himself is a house of prayer. Remember Jesus said, "My Father's house is a house of prayer," taking the language from Isaiah 56:7, "and you've turned it in to a den of thieves." A house of prayer...prayer synonymous with worship, a house where you go to offer yourself and your petitions and your praise to God. It was that time and the crowd ascended the long steep steps up to the temple mount. They went up, *anabaino*, they ascended up there to worship. The two men are in the crowd and everybody would understand. It's a very familiar scene, every morning, every afternoon the same scene went on.

They're going up there because an atonement is going to be made for sin. Some are going up there feeling they need the benefits of that atonement. Some are going up there to display themselves and they're just looking for a crowd to gather for that purpose. There would be a time when all of the people would gather around the altar as the sacrifice was being made, after which the incense being burned, people would then pray. The Pharisee, very familiar to us, we don't need to say any more about them, you know all there is to know...self-righteous, self-promoting, self-satisfied purveyors and protectors of the religion of human achievement. Tax collector, also familiar. We've seen tax collectors already in four chapters, this is the fifth time. We know they were the low lifes of that society because they had purchased tax franchises from the Romans who were the idolaters, oppressors, thus desecrating themselves. They then extorted money from their own people using strong-armed thugs and any intimidation, manipulation or criminal activity they could and were surrounded by the low life, riff-raff of society. So they are shown going up together with the crowd, but they separate when they get there.

And first we see the Pharisee. The Pharisee stood...nothing wrong with standing. In fact, standing was an acceptable and in fact normal posture for prayer. There were many other postures, kneeling, lying prostrate was also a proper posture for prayer...hands down, hands up, eyes down, eyes up. But

it was a common way to pray. Put your hands up, lift your eyes up standing. We see that many times in Scripture. We see it with 1 Kings 8 standing to pray, Nehemiah 9 the leaders of Israel standing to pray. Jesus even talks about in Matthew 6:5 standing in a posture of prayer but not doing it to be seen of men. He says don't be like the hypocrites who stand in order to be seen by men. Well here's one of those hypocrites. Not wrong to stand but to stand to be seen by men. Again you go back to the issue of the heart. Very likely he would take his place in a most visible location and nearest to the holy place that he could get to show his proximity to God. He wants to be wherever God is believed or deemed to be, to give the unwashed around him a good look at a truly righteous man. He takes his posture there.

You see not only his posture, one of self-promoting pride, but you see here his prayer. And this is an interesting statement, "He was praying to himself....praying this to himself." That can have two possible meanings. One, he was inaudibly praying. When you say you were talking to yourself, you probably mean you're talking so nobody else can hear you. That is possible but not likely that he was just mumbling and moving his lips like Hannah in 1 Samuel 1, a kind of private personal soliloquy. It's unlikely that that is the idea here. And the construction lends itself better to understand that he was actually directing his prayer in a self-congratulatory fashion. And that is fairly well indicated by the fact that in two verses he refers to himself five times. That's pretty hard to do. You have to have short sentences and a lot of first person pronouns. This is a self-congratulatory prayer and the translation of the NAS is a good translation. "The Pharisee stood and was thus praying to himself." He is parading himself. This is no prayer to God, he gives God no praise. He asks nothing from God, no mercy, no grace, no forgiveness, no help. But he does refer to God. "God," because you're supposed to, that's the way all prayers are supposed to begin, "I thank you that I'm not like other people." Wow. Well what's there to thank God for? You've done this on your own. This is sheer hypocrisy. This is an unequivocal confession to God of his worthiness, of his righteousness. Thanking God for what you are on your own. This is where self-righteousness leads you. I'm good enough. God, I thank You that I'm good enough. I'm good enough to have a relationship with You. I'm good enough to be here in Your temple. I'm good enough to be standing by this holy place. I'm good enough to be the paragon of religious righteousness and virtue. I'm good enough to stand here so all the low lifes can see what a really godly man looks like.

My guess is the intent of our Lord is to say that he prayed in the direction of himself in a self-congratulatory prayer probably audibly since typically Jewish people did pray audibly. The only prohibition the rabbis give is that you are to pray audibly but not to yell. There are some interesting passages in Jewish history that talk about how the rabbis rebuke people who tried to out-shout others in their praying. But he's really putting on a demonstration. And so everybody gets the message and so God can truly appreciate his achievement, he gets specific. And the way all self-righteous people do, he compares himself to the worst. So he says, "I'm not like other people, swindlers." *Harpax*is the Greek word, it's robbers...robbers. "Unjust," *adikos*meaning cheaters, dishonest, "adulterers," *moichos*, immoral sexual sinners, "I'm not like that." And by the way, those are all categories of

people who fit into the association of the tax collectors, tax collectors and the assorted sinners and prostitutes that were part of the low life of society.

So he compares himself to the people he despises, the lowliest of the people he despises, all those kinds of sin associated with tax collectors and their companions. And then the moment he sees a good illustration of exactly the kind of person he is not, and so he says, "Or even like this tax gatherer." Now that's that obnoxious self-righteousness. He's praying to himself, putting on a demonstration for people that he thinks God is also impressed with. Asks nothing from God, seeks nothing from God, needs nothing from God. He just wants people to hear what a truly righteous man is like. And he must have kept himself a little bit of distance away. If he were to brush against any *umhartis*he would be unclean. And physical isolation for a Pharisee was a statement. They stood aloof from others when they gather around the altar, they stood aloof from others at all time in society, they never had a dinner or a lunch at their house with anybody but another Pharisee, unless they invited somebody in which to trap Jesus. According to the Mishnah, by the way, the Jewish Law, at the time of the incense, after the sacrifice in the morning and evening service, prayers were made and when the prayers began, according to Mishnah, there was a delegation of Jews that was responsible at the time at the beginning of the prayer..of the praying to find the unclean people in the crowd and clear them away to the eastern gate...get all the unclean people out. And maybe a Pharisee like this would wonder why there was even a tax collector in his vision who should have been ushered off and out the eastern gate.

But his prayer is not complete in saying what he's not. He wants to let you know and let God know and let everybody else know what he is. He is not only not immoral, he is very religious. He qualifies on both counts. He is moral and religious. How religious is he? Verse 12, "I fast twice a week." Impressive, huh? By the way the Old Testament only prescribed one fast, Day of Atonement, preparation for the Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16:31 called for a fast. There are no other required fasts. There were times of sorrow, times of penitence, times of mourning when people fasted and that was something you could choose to do. But there was only one prescribed fast. But as I said, these self-styled, self-righteous, external legalists like to invent rituals and ceremonies as all false religions do. And they get more complicated and more complicated and more complicated and more symbolic and more symbolic in direct proportion to the absence of truth and reality. And so they had developed a scheme of fasting on Monday and Thursday...Monday and Thursday. Why Monday and Thursday? Because those were the market days and the crowds were bigger, so you could go into the big crowd and throw a bunch of ashes on your head and look sad and fast...spiritual impression would be made. And why Monday and Thursday? Some other writers say, "Well because it was a Monday, according to some rabbi, that Moses went up to Sinai and 40 days later he came down on a Thursday." So Monday and Thursday. Some other rabbi offers this explanation, "Because Monday and Thursday are equal distant from the Sabbath while being as far from each other as possible."

So all these little twisted convoluted things they had developed a way to make a fair show in the flesh. That's what Paul says in Galatians 6:12, and fasting was part of it. Jesus condemned that, remember, in the sixth chapter in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, "Don't fast like the hypocrites fast, in the public streets and in the corners, calling attention to yourself." It's talking exactly about this. People putting on external spiritual displays by ritualistic ceremonial behavior by the clothing they wear, the garb, the way they dress as if this is the mark of real holiness.

Further he says, "I pay tithes of all that I get." Sounds like a good Baptist. But not really. I pay tithes of all that I get. The Old Testament laid down prescription for tithing, ten percent of what you get goes to fund the national theocratic government, ten percent goes to fund the national festivals and feasts on high holy days, and ten percent every third year for the poor. So it was three and a third a year, so about a 23 and a third percent tax, that's what funded the theocratic kingdom of Israel. Now that's all the Lord required. Then there was a half-shekel temple tax and that was it. But again, they wanted to invent laws to appear righteous, so in Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42, I think it is, it says that they tithe of mint and anise and cumin. Those are tiny little spices. They tithed the tiny little seeds and leaves of the spices as a way to demonstrate their virtue, their holiness, their law-keeping. They went beyond the Law. A Pharisaic prayer dating from about the time of Jesus goes like this, "I thank Thee, Jehovah, my God, that Thou hast assigned my lot with those who sit in the house of learning and not with those who sit in the street corners. I rise early and they rise early. I rise early to study the words of the Torah and they rise early to attend the things of no importance. I weary myself and they weary themselves. I weary myself and gain thereby while they weary themselves without gaining anything. I run and they run. I run toward the life of the age to come. And they run toward the pit of destruction." That was self-righteousness in the Pharisaic mind.

So Jesus is telling this parable to those kinds of people who think they can be good enough to please God, satisfy God, achieve righteousness, be acceptable into His Kingdom and into His heaven by being moral and religious. And then the story changes dramatically with these words. "But the tax gatherer," and here it really gets interesting. That's next week. Let's pray.

Father, we...we know how foundational this is to the glorious plan of redemption. Our hearts ache as the world over people believe the great lie, the big lie, the massive deception that heaven is for the people who are good enough. And here were the people who were as good as good gets from a human viewpoint. And it wasn't good enough. It never is. By the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be justified. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees you'll never enter the Kingdom of heaven. Heaven doesn't belong to those who are good enough. Father, help us to understand this lesson that the only righteousness that satisfies You is Your own righteousness. And the only way we will be acceptable to You is if Your own righteousness belongs to us, is given to us. And the only way You can give Your righteousness to us is to deal with your sin, deal with our sin in Your way and You've done that by placing our sin on Your Son who dies in our place as that perfect, final sacrifice. Justice is satisfied, sin is punished in Christ. Our sins imputed to Him and Your

righteousness imputed to us. Paul says I saw and I considered all my own righteousness as waste, refuse, dung and I found in Christ a righteousness not my own through the Law, but the righteousness of God that comes by faith. It's been that way all along. You justified Abraham because he believed and You granted him righteousness by faith. You were able to do that because Christ would die and pay in full the penalty for Abraham's sins and all the sins of all who have ever believed. But there are many all over this planet who don't understand that they don't have the capability to be righteous to please You and they need to cast themselves on Your mercy. Continue to open up the truth of this Scripture to us as we move ahead to hear the glorious ending and are reminded again that You embrace the penitent sinner, not the self-righteous. Heaven is for those who know how sinful they are, not for those who think they belong there. Continue, Lord, to make this clear and powerful in our lives and may we be faithful to proclaim Your gospel in Your Son's name. Amen.

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