

Who Can Be Right With God? Part 2

Scripture: Luke 18:9-14

Code: 42-229

Let's open the Word of God to the eighteenth chapter of Luke's gospel, Luke chapter 18, and we are looking at a beloved and familiar parable which our Lord taught, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. I want to read it to you and then we'll consider again the marvelous significance of this parable. Luke chapter 18 verses 9 through 14. Here's what the Word of God says:

"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 am 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."

This was certainly jolting, stunning idea conveyed by the Lord Jesus in this story. When He came to the punch line and said the tax collector went down to his house justified and not the Pharisee, He put Himself 180 degrees away from the prevailing Jewish theology of salvation, and for that matter, the theology of all world religion. Jesus was saying, "It is not the man who is good who is justified, but the man who knows he is wicked that is justified."

The dominant religious idea in Judaism at the time of our Lord, the dominant religious idea in the world always then and now is the idea that good people go to heaven, that if you are moral and religious you can achieve salvation, escape from divine judgment, become acceptable to God. It's a matter of how good you are, how moral you are and how spiritual or religious you are. This is frankly the big lie that dominates the world, that people can earn heaven by being good enough. It is to such people that this story is directed.

You remember I told you last time our first point was the comprehensive audience. Look at verse 9, "He told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous." This is for everybody who thinks you get to heaven by being good enough, who trust in themselves, says our Lord, or says Luke as he records this text, who believe that they can achieve a relationship with God through their morality and their spirituality and their religiosity.

Now we know that leading the parade of self-righteous people, people who think they can be good enough to enter heaven was the Pharisees, this group of Jews who were fastidious law keepers, because back in chapter 16 and verse 15, Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men. You are those who make yourselves righteous in the sight of men but God knows your hearts." They led the parade of those who lived with the illusion that you can earn salvation, that you can be good enough for God to accept you. This parable is told for the benefit of anybody who thinks that way. That's why I say it is a comprehensive audience in view here because the whole world of people in every religion but the true one think that way. There are only two possibilities in the world...either you can be good enough to achieve a right relationship with God, or you cannot. Either you can earn salvation by morality and religion, or you cannot. That's all there is, really, to discuss. Whatever the religious label is, it is either a conviction that you can or you cannot. The true religion, the religion of Scripture, the true way of salvation says you cannot by your own effort, your own self-righteousness, your own morality, or your own religiosity, or spirituality please God in any way, therefore earn acceptance with Him. Every other religious system in the world is a system of human achievement to one degree or another that assumes that you can do something to achieve a right relationship with God.

In this story, you have the Pharisee who is the epitome of achievers in morality and religion. He is the most fastidious careful law keeper on the planet, and he's associated with the Old Testament Law and so he's very close to the revelation of God, not as if he was in some pagan religion but this having to do with actual Old Testament divine truth. And so, he's as good as it gets, but not good enough. The self-confessed sinner, on the other hand, is as bad as it gets, the most despised of all outcasts and yet he is the one of whom Jesus said, "He went down justified, or just, or right, or righteous with God, acceptable and approved by God." That idea to religious people in the religions of human achievement, that idea to a Jew in the Judaism of that day and particularly that idea to a Pharisee would constitute a kind of outrage. In fact, they might deem it blasphemy because they would tend to see it as a lowering of the divine standard. It would be an attack on the holiness of God, in their view, to say that the worst of sinners is justified and the best of righteous men is not. That would not only be an upside-down inverted theology, but that would constitute a kind of blasphemy against God, tainting His holiness to accept such an evil person into His Kingdom.

Now remember, the subject has been the Kingdom of God, that is the subject of Jesus' teaching and preaching generally throughout His ministry, even after His resurrection. For 40 days He teaches things concerning the Kingdom of God. But in particular, starting in chapter 17 verse 20, He's been talking about His Kingdom, its spiritual aspect and its future material and eternal aspect. And we said there are three aspects to the Kingdom of God...one is spiritual, the Kingdom of God is within you. Second is millennial, or earthly, when Jesus comes to set up His Kingdom on earth. And a third is eternal, the eternal new heaven and new earth, the final form of His Kingdom, the spirit of salvation over which God rules His redeemed people. He's been talking about the Kingdom.

That poses the question then of who gets into the Kingdom and how do they get in? Who is a part of that spiritual Kingdom will therefore participate in the earthly Kingdom and live forever in the eternal Kingdom. Who is qualified? Who is acceptable to God in the Kingdom? Jesus answers that question here and He answers it contrary to the conventional religious wisdom of the time and the place in which He said it, and frankly, of all conventional religious viewpoint throughout the history of religion. All religions but the truth assume that you are good enough somehow by your morality and your religion to be just with God, to be righteous in God's eyes, to be accepted into His Kingdom. The conventional answer is not what our Lord says.

If you just take the word "justified" for a moment, it means to be held as righteous..right. It means to be declared guiltless, forgiven, acquitted, cleared of all charges. And that is necessary for someone to enter into God's Kingdom. You have to be acquitted, you have to be forgiven, you have to be cleared, you have to be declared not guilty. And human religion says you can achieve it on your own, and Scripture says you absolutely cannot. The issue is simple then, again I say either you can or you can't, and if you think you can, whatever the religious label you wear, you're on the wrong side of reality.

Now the whole issue starts with an understanding of what God's requirement is. And if you go back to the book of Leviticus, you hear Him say, "Be holy for I am holy. Be holy for I am holy. Be holy for I the Lord your God am holy." And He establishes a standard of absolute holiness. No one can meet that standard. Jesus reiterates it in the New Testament, Matthew 5:48, "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." God's requirement is perfection. And though the Pharisees were as good as it gets, as good as you can possibly be, they were quasi-biblical in their religion, they were as close to the truth as you can get. Jesus also said to them in Matthew 5:20, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven." To understand that is to understand the bottom line. You have to be as good as God, you have to be as holy as God, you have to be as righteous as God. And either you can achieve that, or you can't. Scripture's clear that you can't...that you can't. Romans 3:20 says, "By the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be justified." You can't do it by keeping God's Law. Galatians 3 says that, simply this, "Anyone who tries to come to God by keeping the Law will be cursed because you can't do it." And James 2:10 says, "If you offend in one point, you're guilty of violating all of it." So there's no way to God by morality, law keeping, and religious effort. And that is the message of this story. It is a very definitive parable given by our Lord.

So, as we saw last time, the first point, the comprehensive audience means that the story is directed at anybody who thinks that he can earn salvation, or that she can earn salvation, or make some kind of personal contribution by morality, spirituality, or law keeping, or religious ceremony. We move from the comprehensive audience to the contrasting analogy, verse 10. That takes us into the story and we will just briefly reiterate what we said last time. "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a

Pharisee and the other a tax gatherer."

There were two times a day when the people of Jerusalem would ascend the steps on the south side of the temple where you can still go and climb those very same steps even today. They led to the temple mount. It was nine o'clock in the morning and it was three o'clock in the afternoon when the morning and evening sacrifice were held. It had been ordained by God in the twenty-eighth chapter of Numbers that there would be a morning and evening sacrifice, and that at that event there would be an offering of the burnt offering, as defined in Leviticus 1, as a sin offering and as an atonement for the sins of the people. There would also be a time of priestly blessing. There would be an offering of incense symbolizing prayer to God. And this ritual was attended with other components and elements as well.

So, at nine in the morning or at three in the afternoon, usually the afternoon...one was more well attended than the morning one, I understand. At one of these such morning or evening sacrifices, the crowd ascends into the temple and in the crowd there are these two men. One of them is a Pharisee, the other is a tax collector. They go up there to pray and pray is simply a synonym for worship. They go up there to express their adoration and worship of God. They go up there because they know there's going to be a sacrifice offered and they want that sacrifice to apply to them. They want the benefits of that atonement to fall upon them. They also want to go up there so that they can join with the symbolic incense and having experienced the sacrifice, the incense comes afterward. That is to say once sin is atoned for, then prayer can be offered to God. They go to pray to receive the blessing to participate in the ceremony.

They couldn't be more different. They are polar opposites. The Pharisee is THE most religious, THE most respectable, THE most honored, revered man. And the tax collector is the most hated, the most despised, the one who would be treated with the utmost contempt. One, the Pharisee, is a self-confessed righteous man. The other, the tax collector, is a self-confessed unrighteous man.

Now we already met the first one, the Pharisee in verse 11. Let's just go back and look at it briefly. The Pharisee stood, he stood...that is a legitimate posture for prayer, even Jesus talked about in Mark 11 when you stand to pray, pray this way. It was legitimate to stand and pray this way and the typical posture to do this was to stand with your eyes uplifted to heaven and your hands uplifted as well. It's sort of like the prayer that the Apostle Paul instructs the church through Timothy, that holy men are to pray with uplifted hands. This is a typical posture. You are open faced before God because you have a right relationship to God. You come into His presence with arms uplifted, ready to receive that which God provides for you, as well as offer up your praise. And the Pharisee took a posture then that was a legitimate one. But in particular, they would take this posture probably in a very, very visible place, apart from the people because they didn't dare touch a common person, the Habbareen(??), the holy ones didn't touch the Umharets(??), the unholy and the unclean. So it would be at a distance but in full view, Jesus, remember, condemned them in the Sermon on the Mount in

Matthew 6:5 because they loved to take the place of prayer in public view and stand where everyone could see them. And that's what he did. He stood there in good visibility for all the crowd to see what a holy man looked like.

And then it says he was praying thus to himself. We talked about the fact that this simply means this is a soliloquy and not a prayer. He has no relationship to God, no connection to God. God doesn't have to listen to anything he says nor respond to it. This is nothing more than a sort of self-induced spiritual soliloquy in which he talks to himself. And he offers himself congratulations for his moral and religious achievement. And five times in two verses refers to himself...I...I...I...I...I, and pretty clear who he worshiped. He invokes the name of God because that's the respectable and expected thing to do, although he asks God for absolutely nothing because in his view there's really not anything that he can think of that he needs. He has no lack. He is like the rich young ruler we'll meet in a few passages ahead of where we are right now, who did a little inventory on his life and couldn't think of anything that he really lacked. Here is that kind of man. His thanks is really not thanks to God, for why would he thank God for what he himself had achieved? And so in his soliloquy to himself, he affirms how righteous he is, first of all, in the negative side, verse 11, "I thank Thee that I'm not like other people," unequivocal confession of his worthiness and his righteousness and his utter superiority to everybody else. And he even names some people which he is not like, swindlers, unjust, adulterers, and very likely on the surface he was not an open and overt cheat, dishonest, corrupt swindler. He was not someone who was unrighteous on the surface, probably like the Apostle Paul who said of his own pre-salvation life that based upon the Law he was blameless. And he was probably not an adulterer, even though he had a corrupt heart and even though he had wicked thoughts and wicked intentions and even though he had surely committed adultery in his heart, he did not conduct his life on the outside the way those swindlers and unjust and adulterers in that society did.

And then he makes an easy attachment, he says, "Or even like this tax gatherer." That would be an easy jump because tax gatherers were the most despised and despicable people in the culture. They had purchased tax franchises from the occupying Roman idolatrous people, they then paid the Romans what the Romans wanted from them each year. And anything they could make over that, they kept, and so they extorted money out of people any way they could with thugs and strong armed petty criminals. They were surrounded therefore by society sinners and prostitutes and the riff-raff of the culture. They couldn't go to a synagogue, they were the most hated and despised of people in the society. And so he says, "I'm not anything like that bottom rung of society. So by negative illustration, he shows what he's not like.

And then he turns the table and by a positive illustration in verse 12, he shows what he is, "I fast twice a week." Only one fast a year was prescribed, prior to the Day of Atonement. He fasts twice a week. As I told you last time, it was typically on Monday and Thursday because that was market day and that was the day you wanted to fast and if you wanted to be seen because there were more people in town than any other days. And he gives tithes of all that he gets, down to the seeds that he gets.

They tithed of mint and cumin and anise that Jesus referred to, fastidiously religious, avoiding all kinds of external sins and manifesting this kind of detailed allegiance to performance law. And so he celebrates his righteousness.

But in the eyes of God, as we remember from chapter 16 verse 15, he wasn't getting away with anything because God knew his heart. Amos confronted this back in the prophecy of Amos. I'll just read it to you. Chapter 4, the words of God come with dripping sarcasm. In fact, in the promise of God it says in verse 2, "The Lord God is sworn by His holiness. Behold, the days are coming upon you when they will take you away with meat hooks and the last of you with fish hooks." He's talking about Israel being taken into captivity. This is the horrible, final judgment on an impenitent, idolatrous, ungodly Israel.

And then in response to that, here comes the sarcasm. "So enter Bethel and transgress and Gilgal multiply transgressions, bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. Offer a thank offering also from that which is leavened and proclaim free-will offerings. Make them known for so you love to do, you sons of Israel, declares the Lord God." All sarcasm. Just keep coming with your sacrifices and keep coming with your offerings and keep bringing your tithes and your free-will gifts. You love to do that. Just keep it up until you're going to be dragged away in judgment and captivity. Sarcasm from God for this kind of self-righteous religion. And so, the Pharisee is introduced to us as the confessed self-righteous man.

Now the story changes and we get to the serious realities that our Lord wants us to understand in verse 13 when we meet the second character in the story. "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.'" Here is a very different approach, very different.

We have studied the tax collectors many times...chapter 3, chapter 5, chapter 7, chapter 15, and we'll run into one in chapter 19 named Zacchaeus. We know that they were the most hated people in Israel, cut out of all religious activity and social relationships because of what they had done as traitors to their religion and to their nation. They are the most defiled. They are, in the eyes of the people, the farthest from God. And it isn't just the profession that bothers people, it's how they carry it off. They were corrupt. They were swindlers. They were unjust, unrighteous and they were surrounded by the scum and the riff-raff and the adulterers and prostitutes of society. And so this is the worst sinner Jesus can portray in this brief story, as He has already used the Pharisee to present the most righteous man He could portray.

Now let's look at this tax collector. First of all, his location, verse 13, "Standing some distance away," *makrothen*. I told you earlier that *makro* means far away, distant, far off. Where the Pharisee is as close to the holy place he can get, he's in the inner court, he's as close to the location symbolically where the presence of God resides as he can get, because in his own mind he belongs there, that's

where he should be, that's where he wants people to see him and he thinks he's attained that, he's earned it, on the other hand, this man is far off. He is *makrothen*, he is way off on the fringe, on the outer edge. Why? Because he knows he doesn't deserve to be in the presence of God or even the presence of those who are righteous. He is rejected. He is a traitor. But more than that, he is a sinner. He is a pariah not only to the society, but he is a pariah to God. He is a pariah in his own mind and his own heart. He has no right to draw near to God and he knows that. This is humility. This is a sense of alienation and it's revealed in his location.

But secondly, it's revealed also in his posture. Please notice, he was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven. Contrary to the Pharisee, he was happy to stand with arms up, open-faced looking to God, assuming and manifesting that he would certainly be acceptable to God and could look eyeball to eyeball with God, this man will not even lift up his eyes to heaven, meaning toward God. He is overwhelmed with guilt. He is overwhelmed with shame and it shows up in his posture. He knows he is unworthy. He is a swindler. He is unjust, dishonest, a cheat, corrupt, immoral, irreligious, he is a law breaker...he knows it, he feels it, he believes it and he confesses it. And there's not even a hint of the attitude that might say, "Well, I know I'm a sinner, but at least I'm here at the temple so I'm better than most tax collectors I know." He feels the full weight of his alienation from God. It's not just about being alienated from the society because of his profession, it's about being alienated from God because of his sin and disobedience and lawlessness. He has that sense of alienation. He feels that weight of sin and brokenness, that accompanying conviction and remorse. He experiences pain and fear and dread of deserved punishment and judgment. His location says it and so does his posture.

Thirdly, so does his behavior. His behavior is frankly quite unique. It says he was beating his breast, or beating his chest. A study of Jewish history, a study of Jewish social life, a study of the way Jews behaved themselves in ancient times, as well as even up to modern times in the Middle East, will tell you that one of the ways that people prayed was to put their hands over their chest and put their eyes down. This historically, according to Edersheim, the great scholar of New Testament times, was a posture of humility, crossing the hands, bowing the eyes. But this man goes beyond that. This man does something that is unusual, a gesture familiar in Middle Eastern culture even today as it has been for millennia, but still unusual. His hands on his chest, his eyes down, he begins to turn his hands into fists and pound his chest rapidly and repeatedly. This is a gesture that is used to express THE most extreme sorrow, THE most extreme anguish. We find it in Jewish history, we do not find an illustration of it in the Old Testament. We find references to it in Jewish commentaries, ancient Jewish commentaries, but not in the Old Testament. There's only one other place in the New Testament where it happens. Turn to the twenty-third chapter of Luke...the twenty-third chapter of Luke. It is at the cross of Christ just after Jesus died.

And verse 48, "All the multitudes who came together for this spectacle, the crucifixion of Christ, when they observed what had happened, began to return beating their breasts, pounding repeatedly and rapidly their chests." There has never been a more horrific event than the cross. There therefore

could never be a place where there would be more profound anguish than at the cross and there men and women who were there to see that reacted in this dramatic way.

It is interesting again to study history and to find that this gesture common in the past and common in the present is rarely done by men, rarely done by men. It is a female gesture. Women are permitted to show this kind of profound anguish, men are not. I guess it's not manly. One writer says, "After twenty years of observation, I have found only one occasion in which Middle Eastern men are accustomed to beat on their chest. This is at the Ashura(?) ritual of Shiite Islam. This ritual is a reenactment of the murder of Hussein, the son of Aly, the son of Mohammed. And when they reenact the murder scene, they do so in a dramatic way. The men lacerate their shaved heads with knives and razors in a demonstration of intense anguish...he writes...as they recollect this event. At this ritual, the men beat on their chests." This writer says, "Women customarily beat on their chest at funerals but men do not, for men it is a gesture of extreme sorrow and anguish, almost never used. Is little wonder that in all biblical literature we find this particular gesture mentioned only in the account of this parable and at the cross." And then he closes his paragraph by saying, "It takes something of the magnitude of Golgotha to evoke this gesture from Middle Eastern men."

So here is a man doing a gesture that demonstrates extreme anguish. And why his chest? Why not pound somewhere else on the body? An old Jewish commentary says, and I quote, "Why do the righteous beat on their heart as though to say all is there? The righteous beat their heart because the heart is the source of all evil longing."

This is a recognition of what our Lord taught, that it's out of the heart that all evil comes. You remember the words of our Lord Jesus, Mark 7:21 and Matthew 15:19, parallel passages. Let me read you Matthew 15:19 and 20, "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders, these are the things which defile the man." He understands this is a man who understands his own sinfulness, his location demonstrates it, his posture demonstrates it, his behavior demonstrates it. He knows what's in his heart. He knows that what Jeremiah said is true, that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. He is anguished over his guilt. He is broken over his shame, his unworthiness. He is crushed and humbled. And it comes out in everything about him and even in his words. He says, "God," and he is truly talking to God, that's not just doing what is expected, he is talking to God, "be merciful to me, the sinner." Those are the words of a true penitent. Start with THE sinner, not a sinner...*to(?) harmartolo*, definite article, THE sinner. Like Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15, "For I am THE chief of sinners." This is an unequivocal confession of his extreme and supreme sinfulness and there's no comparing him with others...he is THE worst sinner. And that is a legitimate response because of all the sinners in the world, he knows he knows himself to be the worst because no sinner knows so much about himself as the individual himself. He knows about other sinners, but he knows his own heart better than he knows anybody else. Who knows the spirit of a man but the spirit of the man that is within him?...says the Scripture. He is THE worst sinner in the world, as far as his personal knowledge is concerned.

Now at this point I just want to interject a very critical understanding. The Pharisee and the Sadducee had a lot...the Pharisee and the tax collector had a lot in common. The Pharisee and the tax collector, they're agreed on a lot of things. They both understood the Old Testament to be the revelation of God. They were committed to Judaism. They believed in the God of the Old Testament, the Creator-God of the Old Testament, the God who drowned the world in the days of Noah. They believed in the God who revealed His Law on Mount Sinai to Moses, they believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and then the God of Moses and they believed in the God of David. And they believed in the God of the prophets. They believed in the God of the psalmists. They believed in the God of the Old Testament. They believed in the God that had revealed Himself to Moses as gracious, merciful, compassionate, tender-hearted. They believed in the God who was merciful, the God who was righteous and holy. They had believed in the Scripture. They believed in the religious system that had been revealed in the Old Testament, the system of sacrifice, of priesthood. So we could say that they believed. Essentially they believed the same thing, the same God, the same authoritative Scripture. And I'll tell you something else. The Pharisee had faith in God, he believed in God. He believed in the true and living God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He believed in the God who was the Savior God. He believed in the sacrificial system. He believed in atonement for sin. He believed in God's forgiveness.

You say, "You mean he really believed in God's forgiveness?" Sure. A Pharisee didn't believe that he never committed any sin ever in his entire life. He just believed that he had earned the right to be forgiven. When I was meeting with some of the leaders of the Mormon church, we were having a conversation, one of the stunning statements they made to me and they wanted to affirm it again and again as we believe salvation is all of grace, all of grace. And I said, "Okay, well then if I want to be sure to go to heaven, what do I need to do?" And they said, "Well first of all you have to be baptized in this Mormon ritual, and then you have to join the Mormon church, and then you would have to adhere to..." and they started down this list.

I said, "Wait a minute. It doesn't sound like grace, it sounds like works." And as I pressed the issue, it came around to this...isn't God gracious that He allows us to earn our salvation? That's how it kind of worked out. God didn't have to do that, it's all grace. Now the Pharisee just thought he had earned forgiveness. He thought for sure his sins were covered by the atoning sacrifices. For sure he was going to receive the full forgiveness of God, he was a part of the Kingdom of God. So he believed in the true God, he believed in the Scripture, he believed in the sacrifice, the atonement that God was gracious to him and God was kind to him and God would forgive him because he earned it. That's the way religious people think. It isn't that the world is full of people who don't think they've ever done anything wrong, it's just that they think they have not done as much wrong as they have done right. And so they've tipped the scales in their favor and God is going to forgive the stuff that they've done because they've earned it.

So what is the difference then between these two? The difference is as simple as this, repentance. Faith is a given...faith is a given. And, ladies and gentlemen, I telling you, this is the heart and soul of where gospel ministry has to go. You find a lot of people who believe things that are biblical, believe in the Jesus of the New Testament, believe in the New Testament to one degree or another, believe in the cross, believe in the resurrection. The element of faith so often in the Bible, so often in the gospels, the element of faith is sort of a given, that they believe in God and the God who is revealed in Scripture, etc., etc. The issue comes down to whether or not they will repent of sin in a true and genuine act of penitence.

The defining distinction here is that the first man has nothing for which to...what?...repent. He's like the rich young ruler, he says, "I've kept everything since my youth. I can't find anything I need to confess or repent of." That is the issue. There is no possibility of salvation apart from this kind of repentance because this is the defining element.

Now notice what he says. "Be merciful to me..." The Greek is, very important phrase, *hilaskotimoi...hilaskotimoi*. *Hileos tatis* not to show mercy, that's a different word. If you go down to verse 38, Jesus meets a blind man in verse 38 of this chapter, and the blind man calls out and says, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." That is a true translation of *eleoson me*(??) different word from the verb *eleeo* which means to show mercy. That's exactly what that means, to show mercy. *Hilaskotimo* comes from the Greek verb *hilaskomai* which means to propitiate, to appease, to make propitiation, to make satisfaction. And every word attached to that verb root, *hilas* whether it's *alamos*(?), *halasterios*(?), *hilaos*(?), they all have to do with the same idea. This is what he said, "God, be propitious to me. God, be appeased toward me."

What is he saying? He's saying this, "God, please apply the atonement to me." He understood the theology of atonement. He understood the wages of sin is death, the soul that sins shall die. He understood all the way back to the wonderful story of Abraham and Isaac that God would provide a sacrifice that would satisfy Himself and would satisfy His justice, a substitute. He understood that the millions of animals that had been offered throughout all of Jewish history were symbolic of the fact that God could be appeased by a sacrifice, though none of those sacrifices ever gave the final appeasement to God, otherwise they would have ceased. He's talking atonement language here. This is not a general plea for mercy. And this needs to be expressed clearly because sometimes when we present the gospel, all we want to do is say God loves you and has a wonderful purpose for your life and God wants you to have the joy and happiness and all of this and if you just ask Him, He'll be merciful to you.

That's not what he's saying. He is saying, "I am a wretched sinner. I am unworthy to stand near you. I am unworthy to look up toward you. I am in profound agony and anguish over my wretchedness. I need an atonement for my sins to be applied to me." That's what he's saying. This is about sin and

atonement.

This verb is only used two times in the New Testament, one here and the second use in Hebrews 2:17 where it says concerning Jesus Christ that He is a faithful high priest in things pertaining to God to make propitiation for the sins of His people, to make satisfaction, to satisfy the wrath of God, to satisfy the justice and holiness and vengeance of God. And that's what this man is crying for...O God, please apply the atonement to me, make atonement to me. That very day a sacrifice had been made on that altar, he pleads that it would apply to him. He understood the theology of substitution, imputation and atonement. They knew that there would come one day a Son of David, a root out of Jesse, Isaiah 53, and He would bear our iniquities and He would die in our place. That's what Isaiah 53 says, "He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. And by His sacrifice we have peace with God. Please, O God, please make the atonement apply to me. May Your anger with me over." That's the plea of a penitent sinner. "O God, cease being justifiably, righteously angry with me. May Your justice be satisfied through atonement."

One historian says this, "One can almost smell the pungent incense, hear the loud clash of ceremonial cymbals, see the great cloud of dense smoke rising from the burnt offering. And the tax collector is there, stands afar off, anxious not to be seen, sensing his unworthiness to stand with the participants. In brokenness he longs to be a part of it all. He yearns that he might stand with the righteous. In deep remorse he pounds his chest and cries out with repentance and hope, 'O God, let it be for me. Make an atonement for me, a sinner.'" There in the temple, this humble man aware of his own sin and unworthiness with no merit of his own to commend him, longs that the great dramatic atonement sacrifice might be applied to him.

Now you might think that these two people weren't that far apart, theologically. They both believed in the same God, the same authoritative document, the Old Testament, the same Judaistic religion. They both understood the sacrificial system. They both believed in atonement. There's just one fine difference and it's what divides everybody on the planet. It is that one of them thought he could please God on his own, the other one knew he couldn't. That's what separates everybody, absolutely everybody.

The Pharisee's attitude would have been, "Take that guy and throw him out the eastern gate with the rest of the riff-raff and the unclean who don't belong on the temple mount." But the Pharisees didn't know the heart of God at all because Jesus said this in verse 14, and we move from the comprehensive audience and the contrasting analogy to the confounding answer, stunning. "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." *Dikaiominus(????)*, justified, perfect passive participle, having been justified, done with permanent results...permanently right with God, stunning, absolutely shattering their theological sensibilities. Are you kidding? That's why Jesus says, "I tell you..." Why does He say that? Why begin like that? Because He knows He couldn't get this anywhere else in Judaism. He can't quote a rabbi, He speaks with absolute authority, "I tell you..."

Here is sound soteriology from incarnate God. "I tell you, this man went down to his house..." That's not what the rabbis tell you, that's not what the scribes tell you, that's not what you have heard. "I tell you, this man went down to his house having been made just, having been made righteous, having been made acceptable." And speaks of a completed condition, the verb form, a state of having been declared righteous and that's permanent.

This would draw gasps from the legalists. Think of it, Jesus...God in human flesh...the holy one, the perfect sinless one says that in one moment an extreme sinner can be pronounced instantly righteous without any works, without any merit, without any worthiness, without any law keeping, without any moral achievement, spiritual accomplishment or ritual. No time lapse, no penance, no works, no ceremony, no sacrament, no meritorious activity whatsoever, nothing to do, instant declaration of justification on the spot, permanent. Wow! How can that be? Because the only righteousness that God will accept is perfect righteousness and since you can't earn it, He gives it as a gift to the penitent who put his trust in Him. That's the gospel. All the sinner ever does is receive the gift coming in penitent trust, pleading for atonement to be made to satisfy the wrath of God against his sin.

Here is the broken-hearted self-confessed sinner, humble, unworthy, trusting only in God's atonement, pleading that God would apply it to him who is instantaneously made perfect before God...as perfect as God for the righteousness of God is credited to him. He's the one who enters the spiritual and will be in the earthly and will live forever in the eternal Kingdom, rather than the other. The self-righteous pride of the Pharisee and everybody like him only intensifies the alienation. His soliloquy up there just solidified his self-confidence and he went down even more wretched than when he went up. Atonement is worthless to the self-righteous.

So the listening crowd who heard Jesus say this and anybody who reads it is forced to reassess how a person enters the Kingdom of God. It's not by human morality, goodness, or religion, but by repentance and conviction of sin and a plea for an atoning sacrifice.

Doesn't it strike you interesting that there's no Christology here? There's no Christology here? There's no cross here? There's no resurrection here? The...the sacrifice that atoned isn't here, but this is an Old Testament conversion, you understand that this is pre-cross. But the only sacrifice that pleases God is the sacrifice of Christ, right? Therefore it wasn't the sacrifice of the animal that would be applied to this man's account, it would be the sacrifice of Christ pictured in the sacrifice of the animal. There is no righteousness apart from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God is satisfied only with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ because it was God who made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. It was Christ, Galatians 3, who bore the curse for us. Christ is not in this story because this is an Old Testament salvation story. This is the classic of all Old Testament conversion accounts. The work of our Lord is not mentioned because it's not yet occurred. But what is clear is this, that righteousness and justification is a gift from God apart from works that is only made possible through the application of an atoning sacrifice. We leave it to Paul after the cross to teach the rich meaning of the atonement

of Jesus Christ being that one and only sacrifice that satisfies God. But isn't it interesting that the starting point for Paul, the starting point for the New Testament understanding of righteousness through atonement is traceable back to this story which Jesus told?

When I wrote the book *The Gospel According to Jesus* and I rewrote a later edition and a newer edition of it, I wanted to include in that the doctrine of justification. This is the only place in the teaching of Jesus where you have this explicit instruction. It is here that the foundations for the teaching of Paul are found. Christ becomes that sacrifice and it's His death that is applied to all in the past and all sins. However, know this, that there is no salvation on this side of the cross apart from recognizing Christ and His work on the cross, for there is no salvation in any other name.

The Lord ends this amazing story with what I'll call the central axiom...the audience, the answer, the central axiom in verse 14, this is a truism, a proverb, "For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted." Exalted here is a synonym for salvation...a synonym for righteousness. It's used in an Old Testament sense. In the Old Testament, only God is truly exalted and only God can exalt men. Men can't exalt themselves successfully to His level. So this refers to spiritual salvation, reconciliation, righteousness, justification, being in the Kingdom, all efforts to doing that on your own are going to leave you humiliated. Everyone who exalts himself, that is tries to save himself, or make himself righteous, shall be humbled in the severest sense of the word, crushed in eternal loss and punishment. The path of self-exaltation ends up in eternal judgment. God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

On the other hand, all who humble themselves, confessing they can't do anything to save themselves, will be lifted high into eternal glory. The damned think they're good. The saved know they're wicked. The damned believe the Kingdom of God is for those worthy of it. The saved know the Kingdom of God is for those who know they're unworthy of it. The damned believe eternal life is earned. The saved know it's a gift. The damned seek God's commendation. The saved seek His forgiveness.

Father, we thank You for the power that is in this parable, its definitive clarity. Drive it home to our hearts that we might know this glorious truth, we might love it, cherish it and proclaim it to Your glory, for Jesus' sake we pray. Amen.

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