

October 23, 2022

St. Luke 18:9-17:

## **“Where Do We Fit?”**

- I. The Phony.
- II. The Reality.
- III. This Is Where We Fit.

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St. Luke 18:9-17

Dear Friends in Christ,

Here is our starting point: Before God our thoughts and words and deeds are exposed. We cannot hide anything we want to hide. The Word of God says, "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Heb. 4:13). Before God "...all are naked and exposed."

Here are the opening words of our text: "He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt (v.9)." Treated others as if they were beneath consideration and deserving of scorn; worthless. The question is . . .

## WHERE DO WE FIT?

### I. The Phony.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 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. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get (vv.10-12)."

It is important to know that earlier, after a series of Parables from Jesus, the Pharisees ridiculed Him. Jesus said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts (Lk.16:15)." The Pharisee in the parable was standing by himself and prayed about himself so all could see, hear and be impressed.

The Pharisees were loaded with man-made rules and regulations. They fasted each Monday and Thursday. However, the Levitical law stated, "...in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves (fast) and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you (Lev.16:29)." You see? Fasting was required but once each year. But for the Pharisees, everything was "show time." They were pretentious. They were self-righteous.

Most everybody is familiar with Joyce Meyer who has been described as "An American Charismatic Christian author, speaker and president of Joyce Meyer Ministries." She was, years ago, a member of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in St. Louis. Everybody here knows this confession we make: "...I, a poor miserable sinner, confess unto you all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended you and justly deserve your temporal and eternal punishment." Here's Joyce Meyers' theology:

"I am NOT poor! I am NOT miserable, and I am NOT a sinner. That is a lie from the pit of Hell. That is what I were and if I still was then Jesus died in vain! I'm going to tell you something folks. I didn't stop sinning until I finally got it through my thick head I wasn't a sinner anymore. And the religious world thinks that's heresy and they want to hang me for it. But the Bible says I'm righteous and I can't be righteous and a sinner at the same time." - Joyce Meyer. (Quotation from an article from Our Savior Lutheran Church, St. Louis entitled "Joyce Meyers Concept of Sinfulness.")

According to Joyce Meyer, God's chosen Apostle, Paul, evidently got it wrong when he said, "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members (Rm.7:22)." And, of course, John's words: "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (I Jn.1:8)." Where do we fit? Hopefully, with Paul. And, hopefully, with the tax collector.

### II. The Reality.

"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.'"

The man stood “far off.” Apparently he stood at the very back part of the temple. He couldn’t look up to heaven. He could do nothing but see his sin, “beat his breast” and cry out to God for mercy. He doesn’t list his sins. He confesses what he is and it covers everything. We, too, could only cry out his words of David: “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words, and blameless in your judgment (Ps. 51:3,4).” Every sin is first and foremost against God!

Of the tax collector’s confession, Jesus said: “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other (the Pharisee). For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted (v.14).”

The Scriptures are clear: “For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly. But the haughty he knows from afar (Ps. 138:6).” Recall these words God gave to John: “If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 Jn.1:10).” And just in case that’s understood to mean that confession of sin is what we do when we are first brought to faith, and after that we can declare something along the line of, “But the Bible says that I’m righteous and I can’t be righteous and a sinner at the same time. (Joyce Meyer),” - let’s make sure we hear God’s Word concerning the faith God worked in Abraham:

“...his faith was counted to him as righteousness.’ (In and of himself, in this world, he wasn’t and would never be righteous as God demands!) But the words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Rm. 4:22-25).”

Remember what Paul said **after he was brought to faith** and reckoned as righteous through faith and faith alone: “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out (Rm.7:18).” The battle with sin is on-going as the battle must be! And so is the promise, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Rm.8:1). We are sinners/saints until our entrance into eternal life to be forever with Jesus. That’s where the repentant heart fits!

### III. This Is Where We Fit.

How interesting and appropriate that verses 15-17 were included in the Gospel text for this Sunday; verses that follow *The Parable of the Pharisee and The Tax Collector*.

Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

First, the disciples rebuked the parents for bothering Jesus with children. Maybe they figured children couldn’t repent and believe. Maybe they were not familiar with the words the Lord gave David: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me (Ps.51:5).”

Second, Jesus says “...for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” **To such.** To those with child-like faith. The disciples had the Word just as we have the Word; the Word where David said, “Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother’s breasts. On you I was cast from my birth, and from my mother’s womb you have been my God (Ps. 22:9,10).” The Disciples heard Jesus’ words, as recorded by Matthew: “But whoever causes one of these little ones (the tiniest) who believe in me to sin (the Greek word is the same word as used in John 3:16, ‘whoever believes in him has eternal life’), it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. (Mt.18:6).”

So, let's hear it one more time, "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child shall not enter it (v.17)." Jesus was teaching the disciples about the kind of people who could enter the kingdom of God. People who offered God nothing but their sinful broken heart; were helpless, as in the case of the little ones. Commentator Victor Prange sums it up nicely: "Like the sinful tax collector pleading for mercy, the person who desires to enter the kingdom must come in childlike weakness and take what God has to give." (Victor H. Prange, People's Bible Commentary, Luke, CPH, St. Louis, p.198)

*Where do we fit?* Well, as Christ's people, we fit with the tax collector, with infants; with poor, helpless and miserable sinners who cry out for mercy. Each day we carry with us the promise of Scripture, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Ps. 51:17)." And if anyone is tired of hearing about sin and the need for Jesus, then they're tired of Jesus and the promise of eternal life. We are to remember "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit (Ps. 34:18)." That's why Jesus went to the Cross - to pay for sin that causes the broken heart and crushed spirit; to fulfill the promise that "whoever believes in him has eternal life."

Our post sermon hymn is "Rock of Ages." We will sing together, "Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to Thy cross I cling. Naked, come to thee for dress; Helpless look to Thee for grace; Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me Savior, or I die." This is where we fit - every day.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott