

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF MANCHESTER

THE DYNAMICS OF FAITH

LUKE 18:9-14

# A HUMBLE FAITH

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Please turn to Luke 18. Last week I began a series in Luke 18 we're calling *The Dynamics of Faith*. Last week, "The Dynamics of Persistent Faith" as it is demonstrated by Persistent Prayer. And we see that as Jesus' concluded in **v.8: *Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?***

Today I want to talk to you about *The Dynamics of Humble Faith*.

## LUKE 18:9-14 (READ)

As we've seen over and over, Jesus and Luke the author (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, links what follows to what is above -here with another parable on the topic of prayer. This time: What does it look like to come before God in trust and humility? What does that look like and what does that NOT look like? We're going to talk about from the Word of God today.

**Hussain Bolt is fast.** Very fast. He currently and for a number of years now, holds the record as *the fastest man on earth* – i.e., the record in the 100m race. He's fast, he's even faster than a lot of really fast guys (like me) are - which makes it even more surprising that people will come up to him, out of the blue, challenging him to race. And he says it happens more than you would think. People come up and say, "Hey Hussain Bolt. I wanna race you. And he says, "Well, you know, we're in a shopping mall. So, no, we're not gonna race." But he said that it happens on a regular basis.

(Men challenging Katelyn Clark in 3 pt. contest)

That seems crazy, that anybody would challenge someone who's that fast and think that they could somehow beat them in a race. **But it's even more astonishing that we, in our sinfulness and in our humanity, could dare come before God and think that somehow, we can offer up our righteousness to him and be accepted.** That somehow, we can impress God with our *prayers* or with our *worship* or with our *lives*.

In this parable, Jesus talks about two very different men who went up into the temple to pray. Remember Jesus just talked about prayer, and now prayer is part of the backdrop to another lesson on faith (humility).

## [HOW PEOPLE VIEWED PHARISEES]

And before we get into the parable, I sort of need to clarify something for all of us here, just so that we can hear this the way Jesus' listeners would have heard it. Because when we hear **Pharisee**, we usually think - *not a good guy*. Because by this time in Jesus Ministry the Pharisees had made themselves the sworn enemies of Jesus, and they were

fighting him and opposing him at every turn.

But in the days of Jesus, most of the Jewish people looked at the Pharisees and said "These are **THE GOOD GUYS, GREAT** guys. These guys keep God's law. They're very meticulous. They live holy lives and they're generous and they know the Bible." And so they would have a high estimation of a Pharisee.

So as you try to draw from this parable, don't think of the Pharisee as *somebody regarded as bad*. Think of them as someone who you might admire.

## [HOW PEOPLE VIEWED TAX COLLECTORS]

Then in the parable is a **tax collector** (who Jesus makes the good guy). When we hear *tax collector*, likewise we think "Well, he's not my favorite guy to see come April 15<sup>th</sup>." Actually, I've never really met an actual tax collector, have you? (don't raise your hand). But I would guess that today most tax collectors are just people who are doing their jobs and they're probably decent people.

But that's not how they would have looked at a tax collector in those days. A tax collector, often a fellow Jew, sub-contracted with the Roman government to collect tax. And he would always add more fees on top of the taxes and he would keep those fees for himself, and he would coerce and threaten. And he had people (thugs) who would go out and *really* threaten you to get the tax money from you. So when Jesus tells of a tax collector - they felt contempt true hatred.

Now, back to the story...

So they both go to the temple to pray.

If you think about it in our own terms, we can think about a person that we admire a lot and a person we don't trust at all, who maybe has done us wrong (is doing us wrong), both here in church today to pray.

In his day as news anchor, Walter Cronkite was known as *the most trusted man in America*. So let's imagine Walter Cronkite and Attila the Hun coming to church today to pray.

And they come in, and here's the surprise, the *admirable* "Walter Cronkite" *person*, the person that we looked at and trusted is not justified before God. And Attila the Hun the person who we would not trust at all, Jesus says "*Is justified before God*." **Why? Simple answer – humility.**

Humility – seems like a ho-hum, boring topic. Yes? "Nothing sexy about being a humble person." But then I was thinking about it. When you have the chance to know a person, perhaps a very capable person in his/her way, maybe in a lot of ways, maybe a leader of people – AND yet they do all they do with no sense of superiority and they never make you feel inferior, but encourage and build you up – you are so thankful that you know that person. You know a truly humble person.

(Humility is not a person who sees themselves as a door mat – who lacks self-worth and walks around with an inferiority complex and– that's not what humility is. But a

person who recognizes that *he/she is what he/she is* thru the gifts of God and lives with humility and is not filled with self-importance.)

Today I want you to notice **5 principles for how we come to God and how we pray and how we trust God.** Three of them are illustrated negatively by the Pharisee. Two are illustrated positively by the tax collector.

Here's the first thing I want you to see.

## **I. YOU REMAIN FAR FROM GOD WHEN YOU ARE DELUDED ABOUT YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

**V9** Jesus *told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous.* Stop right there. The word *righteous* means *to be just or upright or wholly right before God.* And that's how the Pharisee thought of himself.

Pharisees wore special clothes just to show that they were righteous. Some of them didn't have any jobs other than just being righteous. And so the Pharisee came to pray and he came in with a *self-righteous attitude*, expecting God to stand up and applaud just because he came to church.

Pharisees were probably not the only ones that Jesus was talking about thru this parable. It's to anyone who is trusting in themselves that they are righteous.

There were others who were in this same situation then, and there are others today. There are people who say, "*I don't need a savior to forgive me, I'm a pretty good person. In fact, I think I'm actually a very good person.*"

And sometimes, when we've grown up in church or when we got saved a long time ago, we'll start to *become deluded* about our own righteousness. And we'll say, "*Of course God saved me! If I had been God, I would have saved me too.*"

We start thinking that we're more righteous than we are, *and as a result, we remain distant from God.* **You remain far from God when you're deluded about your righteousness.**

It's put bluntly in Proverbs 30:12 (ESV) *There are those who are clean in their own eyes but are not washed of their filth.*

That's where the Pharisee was. What about you? Have you ever come before God and in your heart (you might not have said it out loud) you thought, "*God, I got it all together. I'm walking the way you want me to walk. There's no real need in my life.*"

You remain far from God when you're deluded about your own righteousness.

Then secondly, the Bible shows us this.

## **II. YOU REMAIN FAR FROM GOD WHEN YOU'RE FULL OF YOURSELF.**

The Pharisee was full of himself. Look, look again in verse 9 *who trust in themselves that they are righteous* and

then look down in **verse 11** as Jesus describes what happens with the Pharisee. He says *the Pharisee, standing by himself prayed* and some translations *prayed to himself*. Even his prayer was directly directed primarily at himself. You can see that in his language. Notice how he prays: *God, I thank you.* That's a good start. But from there, everything goes South. *God, I thank you that I am not like other men. Extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.* We'll talk about what he said about other people in the next point. Just notice what he's saying about himself. *God, I thank you. I'm not like other men.* And he talks about what he did. *I fast twice a week.* God only commanded the Jewish people to fast once a year. The Pharisees fasted meticulously 2 days a week. *God I fast twice a week. I'm seeking you that way.* He was just full of himself and his righteousness.

And he says, and *I tithe of everything I get*, I give tithes. "God, I'm really meticulous about my giving."

And so he was praying and talking about all the things that *he did* and who *he was* and you can just see how *full of himself* he was.

Just count them. How many times does he says *I* in his prayer. *I thank... I am not like... I fast.. I give...* Before your done you count 5 times. He said *God*, one time and *I*, five times.

He needed an eye doctor - he had an "I" problem. When you have an "I" problem **then you're far from God.** Because at the center is pride.

You can't be full of what God wants you to be full of if *you're full of yourself.*

A man had a Yeti (thermos ). Someone said, "*Yeti? What's that? What does it do?*" He responded, "*Well, it keeps hot things hot and cold things cold It's really amazing.*" "What do you have in it?" He said jokingly, "*Hot soup and iced tea.*"

Well, even in a "Yeti" you can't have both a hot thing and a cold thing at one time.

Now you tell me -what do you have to do before you can fill a Yeti with cold iced tea if it has hot soup in it right now? Simple, you've got to empty it of the hot soup.

So many times we want God to fill our lives, but we're not willing to empty ourselves so that he can do what he wants to do in our lives.

I think there are many Christian people who walk through life hoping that God's going to bless them and hoping that God's going to use them, and in the meantime, they are filled with ourselves. Hear me on this. Revival will only come in your life and my life when we empty *ourselves of ourselves*. Only then will God fill us?

- You remain far from God when you're *deluded about your righteousness.*
- You remain far from God when you're *full of yourself,*

### III. YOU REMAIN FAR FROM GOD WHEN YOU ARE ARROGANT TOWARD OTHERS.

Look again in **verse 9**. This verse sets the table for everything else in this parable. And it also tells us that Jesus told this parable not only *to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous* but also those *who treated others with contempt*. That's what the Pharisee did.

The word *contempt* there means *to count someone as nothing*. He counted other people as nothing in comparison to himself.

Stop right there. Pharisaism is always based on comparison. Legalism is always based on comparison. It's always based on having a list of things that you think make you acceptable to God and then comparing yourself to somebody else who you don't think is as impressive.

**And as long as we are arrogant in our assessment of others we remain far from God.** We see that here. What an arrogant prayer this man prayed. Look again there in **verse 11**. *God, I thank you that I am not like other men*. He starts to list them: *extortioners*-people who rob and steal; *unjust* -people who are dishonest and just crooked; *adulterers* -people who don't keep their marital vows, and *even like this Tax collector -and everybody knew about him!* "So God, I'm thankful that I'm not like THEM."

It's an easy trap to get into. To compare yourself to others and thus thinking you've got it all together.

Have you heard the story about the country church where the farmer's wife started sharing something with the new pastor about how she felt about another farmer in the congregation?

She said, "You know. I don't understand how the Browns can stand to do what they do?" The Browns were their neighbors, both livestock farmers. She said, "I don't understand how they can keep those chicken coops so close to their own house. Those chicken coops are the stinkiest things in the whole world. I can't understand how they can stand to be close to anything that stinks as bad as those chicken coops."

She told that to her new pastor...and she had a point. Except for one thing. **She and her husband were hog farmers!**

Now I'm no farmer, far from it, but even *I know* that hogs smell worse than chickens!

But somehow she had convinced herself that the stench of the chicken house wasn't as bad as the stench of the hog pen.

Sometimes we do that in our own lives. We convince ourselves that the stench of our sin isn't anything like the stench of somebody else's sin?

In fact, we can even convince ourselves that the stench of our sin is a pleasant aroma to God. That's what this Pharisee had done. He got himself to the place where he thought, "Hey, I've got it all together. When I look at these other people, extortioners and adulterers and this tax

collector over here - I'm so much better than they are."

You can't come close to God and simultaneously think that you're better than the person next to you in comparison. You only come close to God when you begin to see who you are compared to who God is.

When you do that, you're coming before God and saying, "God, I realize that even one sin is enough to keep me from you forever. And no sin deserves a worse penalty than my sins. I'm accountable before you, and I embrace your atoning love in Jesus Christ to forgive me."

Again, You remain far from God when you're arrogant toward others.

The last two principles are both positive. They talk about how we can draw close to God #4

### IV. YOU DRAW CLOSE TO GOD WHEN YOU SEE YOUR OWN SINFULNESS.

**Verse 13** *but the tax collector standing far off*. I don't know where he stood. This was the temple and maybe the Holy Place was somewhere over there and he stood way over here.

He had a sense of his own sinfulness. He stood *far off*. There he is in the temple but he won't look up. Just looks down. Jesus says *he beat his breast*, which that was a sign of contrition and sorrow and repentance. And in the language of the scripture, he not only did that one time, he kept doing it - just kept beating his breast. Looking down,

And here's how he prayed. *Lord be merciful to me, a sinner*. Literally, he says. *Lord, be merciful to me, the Sinner*. There's a definite article there in the original language of Scripture - *Lord, be merciful to me the Sinner*. "Lord, I'm standing over here, and I know what they think of me." Maybe he could overhear that arrogant Pharisee praying, and he said "Lord, everything he says about me is true. Everything they think about me is true. So, Lord, I'm not coming to you to commend myself or to tell you how wonderful I am. *Lord, be merciful to me The Sinner.*"

**THAT'S WHEN you draw close to God. When you're honest to God about your own sinfulness.** When we see our sinfulness, it just sort of wipes away all of the *phariseism* that we all carry with us. The *comparison* goes away. All of the *arrogance* goes away. When you really see your sin and you really draw close to God that sort of melts away and you see yourself the way God sees you.

**Paul was a Pharisee.** He kept all the laws. He could have prayed exactly the same way this Pharisee prayed. **But he met the Lord Jesus, and when he met Jesus, his life was transformed** and he said this in 1 Tim.1:15. *The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost*. Those are the words of a **recovered Pharisee**. "Man, I thought I had so many things about me to commend myself to you



God. I thought I had everything together. I thought God should applaud every time I came to church. But I came face to face with Jesus Christ, and I realized he came to save sinners. And I'm Sinner-number-one." *God be merciful to me, The Sinner*

You can draw close to God when you see your own sinfulness.

Finally, #5

## V. YOU DRAW CLOSE TO GOD WHEN YOU CLING TO GOD'S MERCY.

Notice how he prayed again. *God be merciful to me, a sinner*. And it's interesting to me the word that he uses for *merciful* is not the normal New Testament word for mercy. The word *merciful* usually means *God withholding his anger and showing us his kindness*. That's not the word that he uses here.

Instead, the word he uses is the same word that's translated elsewhere, **propitiation**. In **1 John 2:2**, says *Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins and not only our sins, but for the sins of all the world*. He was praying God make propitiation for me the Sinner.

What does propitiation mean? **Propitiation means God placing His wrath on someone else for your sin**. That's what Jesus did.

Why did Jesus die on the cross?

He was not a martyr, dying for a cause - He was a savior, dying for your sin.

He didn't die there as an **example**. He died there to **make propitiation** because the Bible says *the wages of sin is what death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord*.

Why did Jesus go to that cross? To make propitiation for you? *He bore the penalty in his own body for your sin*. It should have been you there. It should have been me there, because we're the sinners, and *the wages of sin is death*, but when Jesus went to the cross **He went to make propitiation, to bear the penalty, to bear God's wrath for your sin**. To take the punishment for you in your place.

That's what this tax collector was praying when he said. *"God be merciful to me. God, I know I'm a Sinner. I know I'm the sinner - and I know everything they say about me is true. God, I can't make myself right before you. And so I ask you, I cling to your mercy. And I ask for you to make a way for me to be saved and for me to be right and for my sin to be taken away and for you to show me mercy."*

**NOTICE WHAT JESUS SAID in v.14. I tell you this man** this tax collector *went down from the temple to his house, justified*. That's right with God.

- The pharisee, who had so many things that he did to commend himself, he *wasn't right with God*.
- The one who came and said, *be merciful to me, a Sinner*. He went down to His house *right with God*.

Here's why. *Everyone who exalts himself*, (everyone who lifts himself up) *will be humbled* or brought down, *but the one who humbles himself will be exalted* (lifted up.)

In Life Guard training, it's a basic principle of life saving. Lifeguards are taught is that **it is dangerous to try to save a drowning man or woman while they're still trying to save themselves**. They're thrashing around and trying to stay up and if you try to try to help them then they will take you down with them.

And so, I'm told that lifeguards are taught to swim out toward the person who is struggling and about to drown AND stay close, but far enough away from them that they can't reach you and pull you down with them. And wait until they stop trying to save themselves. And then at that point of surrender you can grab them and you bring them in to safety.

That's where you've got to be to be rescued, saved, forgiven and justified. Where you stop trying to save yourself.

**NOT....**

Not, *"God, I'm not so bad. I'm not as bad as this guy over here or this lady over here. Or this tax collector over here?"*

Not, *"God, I can't help it. This is just who I am."*

Not, *"God, I think I'm a good person and my good outweighs my bad."*

As long as we say/think those things. God can't deal with us with love and mercy the way He wants to deal with us. When we come to him and simply say, *"God be merciful to me The Sinner."* In that simple humility, God opens up his grace and pours out his mercy on us because Jesus Christ came to save and redeem and to help sinners.

TO START OUT WITH GOD: You have to admit, humbly admit your helplessness before Jesus can justify you and give you eternal life. And if you'll do that, even today, he will save you.

*Dear Jesus. I know I am a Sinner. I know you are the Savior. Right now I turn from my sin and I receive You as my Savior. Forgive me and make me Yours. Be my Savior and my Lord forever. Amen.*

TO CONTINUE WITH GOD: And Christian friend, can I tell you, this same thing continues in our Christian life? If we want God to work in our lives. If we want God to bring revival to our lives. If we want to see his hand at work in our lives, it happens at the point of surrender and humility. When we simply say *"God, I can't do it. I'm depending on you."*