

# w e e k 20: *the one with the sinners*

## *Scripture to Read: Luke 18:9-14*

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

## *Summary of the Text*

This parable contrasts a Pharisee boasting in his self-righteousness and a tax collector confessing his sins and seeking God's mercy.

## *Scripture for Memorization and Meditation*

*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!’ –Luke 18:13*

## *Questions for Personal Study and/or Group Discussion*

- We are usually drawn to the differences between the two men in this story. But what do they have in common?
- If a tax collector was the ultimate scum of first-century Judaism, then what kind of person fits that description today? How can someone like that ever become right with God? Can you think of other examples?
- What is wrong with the Pharisees’ prayer?
- C.S. Lewis wrote, “The essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride.” Do you agree? What is it about pride that makes it so evil and harmful to our souls?

- Consider the tax collector’s prayer. Contrast the two ways of coming God as illustrated by the men in this parable. What was right about the tax collector’s prayer?
- This parable is a classic illustration of the doctrine of *justification*. What does it teach about justification? What does the doctrine mean? Why is it so important to keep this doctrine clear in our minds and hearts?
- How does self-righteousness and hypocrisy develop in us? What can be done to stop its development?

## *Thoughts worth thinking*

Love your local tax collector? In Palestine, tax collectors were representatives of the Roman governing authorities. Their tendency to resort to extortion made them despised and hated by their own people (cf. Luke 19:8). They collected tolls, tariffs, and customs, and were notoriously dishonest and greedy.

## From the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

### **Q. 33. What is justification?**

A. Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

“Kyrie eleison!” “The tax collector is not offering a generalized prayer for God’s mercy. He specifically yearns for the benefits of an atonement....He yearns that he might stand with ‘the righteous.’ In deep remorse he strikes his chest and cries out in repentance and hope, ‘O God! Let it be for me! Make an atonement for me, a sinner!’ [Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 154.]

Why didn’t anyone order a background check on these people? “I have been pastor to both Pharisees and tax men and still remember many of their names. It isn’t always easy to tell them apart. Pharisees for the most part have a pretty good opinion of themselves. They hold responsible jobs, care for their families, keep

the commandments most of the time, are familiar with the culture of church life, give their offerings week by week in worship, and usually accept positions of leadership when asked. The tax men (and women) are not all that different in appearance but they do not have a very good opinion of themselves. Many carry huge burdens of guilt from the past. Others are troubled by secret sins, addictions, poisoned relationships, and despair. They manage to keep much of this hidden from others, often from their very families. They often attend church by fits and starts. Some of them do very well in their workplaces but may carry a tangle of scars from sexually or spiritually or emotionally (sometimes all three) abusive parents or relatives, pastors or priests, and have a difficult time feeling at home and accepted in a congregation.

"I am responsible for encouraging, listening to, conversing with, praying for, preaching to, and teaching these people, leading both Pharisees and tax men in following Jesus. Both show up at the place of prayer where I am a pastor. Both are sinners. I am pastor equally to both. I don't find it easy." [Eugene H. Peterson, *Tell It Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in His Stories and Prayers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 136-37.]

#### *Tips for Parents with Young Children*

**Monday:** Read Luke 18:9-14. Have your child draw a picture of the two men praying in the temple. Explain that Pharisees tried hard to keep the rules, and that people respected them. Explain that people did not like tax men because tax men took a lot of their money. (I think this parable is hard to explain to small children.) Point out that the tax collector prayed a better prayer because he humbly asked God to forgive his sins.

**Tuesday:** Focus on the tax man's prayer, *God, be merciful to me—a sinner*. Talk together about confessing sin. Spend some time confessing sin as a family. Remember 1 John 1:8-9: *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

**Wednesday:** Review what your children learned in Wednesday Night Connection. Spend some time together praying for FPC, its leaders, and your friends at church.

**Thursday:**

**Q. 50. What is justification?**

*A. It is God's forgiving sinners, and treating them as if they had never sinned.*

**Q. 56. What is it to repent?**

*A. To be sorry for sin, and to hate and forsake it because it is displeasing to God.*

If your child has learned the *Children's Catechism*, you can review and talk about these two questions. Connect them with the story of the tax collector's prayer. If your child doesn't know these two questions and answers, spend some time memorizing them. Pray through the Lord's Prayer together as a family. Point out the petition, *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

**Friday:** Ask your children what they would like to do (e.g. read a story, pray, sing worship songs, etc.) and then do that with them.

**Saturday:** Read a Bible story to your children, or have them read a story to you if they are old enough. Pray that Phillip will have boldness in preaching the Word of God tomorrow. Also, pray for the Sunday School teachers and for the musicians and choir members who serve us each Sunday.

**Sunday:** Before you leave for church, explain to your children that their ministry at church is to welcome new children, help their Sunday School teacher, serve others, and worship God in the service. After church, discuss with your children what they learned and what you learned.