

The Parables of Jesus: The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

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Date: 30 May 2021

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Well, good morning and welcome to our service for Sunday, May 30th, 2021. My name is Kent Dixon. I'm the lead pastor of Braemar Baptist Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Welcome this morning as you join us in this way, as you, whether you're connecting with us online, live right now on Facebook, or you're tuning in later on during the week, listening or watching, however you're connecting with us, welcome to this place.

Welcome to our community of Braemar Baptist Church. Well, there's a great way to stay connected with us, and that is we send an, I send a weekly email message from me, Pastor's Connecting Point, we call it, as well as a weekly newsletter.

We send that out each week, which includes information from the church, things that are going on, as well as updates, prayer and praise items. So, if you're interested in being connected with us in that way, send an email to info at braemar, B-R-A-E-M-A-R, Baptist.com, and we'll make sure we add you to that email distribution so you get those messages.

If you already received those messages, I encourage you to open them and read them, because that's a great source for the latest information and updates from our church.

[1 : 20] Please pray for the prayer requests that are listed in there, and celebrate with people who are just reflecting through that, that God has answered prayer, because we know that God does act in our lives, and He works in our lives in amazing ways.

So, celebrate with people who are celebrating, and pray for those who need your prayers. Well, as you may have heard, COVID restrictions in our area have been relaxed this past week.

So, we now plan to, drumroll, reopen to in-person services at our church next Sunday, which is June 6th.

Next Sunday, June 6th, we will be open to in-person services at our church. And so, this is hard for me to say, but recognizing that, I want to encourage people who are able to come back to church in person.

And so, here's the hard part. This, right now, will be our last Facebook service for the time being. And that's partly the nature of wanting people to come back in person, encouraging people to come back in person, because we will be doing that safely and wisely.

[2 : 32] But at the same time, it's also recognizing capacity. And so, because we are a small church, and I'm the pastor of a smaller church, I had been doing online and in person before, and we just determined it was a tough go.

And there are other things that I need to be able to focus on, in terms of caring for people. So, but that being said, going forward, you'll still be able to check out sermons on our website.

You'll be able to listen to them there. You can tune in on Apple Podcasts or Spotify. We will continue to have our sermons there as well. Or something brand new, which is our sermon phone-in service.

I'm so excited to be announcing this. So, if you just call 587-400-0533. 587-400-0533 anytime. You can listen to the current week's sermon. So, this is something cool that I've always wanted to do, and now we're able to do that. So, sermons will be updated on Sunday, likely Sunday afternoons each week.

[3 : 44] And then you can listen anytime during the week to the current sermon. Again, that's 587-400-400-0533.

And I recognize that there are people from far and wide who've been tuning in to these Facebook services. So, that's still a great way. The email connection, the phone-in service, or the church

website are still great ways to stay connected with us.

So, my friends, our circumstances we recognize are changing again. But we remember and we're reminded, and I want to remind you this morning, that God remains in control.

And He is good. Let's pray. Father God, thank you for this opportunity. The amazing calling to be your people in this place.

Thank you that you indeed have a plan for all creation. And while you don't need to include us, Father, you want to include us. Thank you for being patient with us and for loving us.

[4 : 47] In spite of our tendencies to often focus on anything but what you've called us to focus on. In your word and through the example of your Son, Jesus Christ.

And thank you, Lord, that in Jesus, through Jesus, you've given us a perfect example of how to care for each other. How to seek you first.

No matter what our circumstances may be. Lord, we need you. And we recognize that without you, we are truly lost.

Not just in our direction, but also in our eternal destiny as well. Father, we recognize that you've provided for our needs and protected us through this time.

And you will be faithful in doing that again. Lord, we thank you for answered prayers. And we ask for your direction and patience in prayers that continue to go unanswered.

[5 : 47] Lord, thank you for everyone who's here this morning. Listening or watching. For the people who will be watching and listening in the days and weeks ahead. Lord, we don't know how you will work through our online gathering.

But we have faith that you have. We have faith that you will. And Father, we have faith that you will keep people encouraged and connected through these other opportunities that you have given for us to provide.

Lord, we ask in faith for you to heal not just our land. Not just Alberta and Canada. But Lord, we ask in faith that you would heal the world.

Not only from this pandemic, Lord. But from racial tensions that have developed. From other things that have been exposed. From ugly things that have been exposed during this time.

Lord, we ask that you would bring that healing in your way. And according to your timing. Lord, above all, we ask that you will bring your kingdom.

[6 : 52] On earth as it is in heaven. Lord, we are yours. Thank you for loving us. And for calling us as your children.

Lord, we are yours. Use us to do your will. And Lord, as we explore the truth of your word together this morning.

May you work through my words. So that you may reveal your truth to each one of us. Specifically as you would have us receive it this morning.

Or at any time we are listening. And we ask all these things in the precious name of your Son. Jesus Christ. Amen. We're continuing in our sermon series on the parables of Jesus.

And throughout this series. We're going to revisit some familiar stories. As well as some that may even be less familiar. Or even relatively new to you. And we're exploring these parables of Jesus.

[7 : 50] That are told in the Bible. We'll continue to do that over the coming weeks. And as always, my prayer for us in this series is. May God grant us to see and ears to hear the truth that is found in the parables of Jesus.

These are not just great stories. They are good stories. But there is more to them. There is deep spiritual truth to these stories. And that's what we're digging into together.

So remember this morning as I go through this sermon. That if you have questions or comments. If you're watching live this morning. Please post them.

Don't be shy. You know, I love to respond. I love to see people interacting as we do these services. So again, this is our last opportunity for this right now.

But it is a good one. So I encourage you to step in. Well, do you like game shows? The Price is Right, Jeopardy, Wheel of Fortune.

[8 : 54] Maybe even you like Ellen's Game of Games. That's one of my favorites. It's silly, but it's very fun. Well, personally, I like game shows where the host asks contestants questions.

And they need to answer on the spot. That's what Jeopardy is like. And that's what some of these other game shows are like. And so I want to have our own little game show this morning.

And maybe this will be an ongoing thing that we do back in church from time to time. So we have no fancy buzzers. Even if we were together in person.

I wouldn't ask you to shout out your answers. This is more of a private opportunity to track your answers. As we play a game called, Am I Judgmental?

Ouch. Pastor Kent, are you really going to go there already? Well, stay with me as we go through this together. Because it will lead into the parable that we're discussing today.

[9 : 52] And it will give you time to think. It will give you some pause. And honestly, believe me, I've considered my own answers to these questions as well.

Question number one. Are you able to see beyond what you perceive to be other people's flaws?

Question two.

Do you tend to believe people are either good or bad? Do you have a black and white view of people? Question number three. Are you quick to make assumptions or jump to conclusions?

Question four. Do you expect other people to behave consistently all the time? Question number five.

Do you find it challenging to see and appreciate the beauty and uniqueness of other people?

Question number six.

[10 : 50] Do you find it difficult to tolerate or relate to people who are different than you? And there's a whole range of ways people might be different.

I think we can recognize that. Question number seven. Do you tend to be overly pessimistic about most things that happen in your life? Question number eight.

Are you a strong critic of not only yourself, but others as well? Question number nine.

Do you praise people for what they do? Or do you tend to criticize people or judge them for what you think they didn't do?

And now question ten. This is our last one, so the pressure is off. Question ten. Do you tend to be suspicious, anxious, or untrusting of other people's motives or intentions?

[11 : 52] And so I'm going to give you a bonus question. What was the most... Was that the most unexpected and convicting game show that you've ever experienced?

I think the answer will probably be yes. So as we reviewed those questions together, we looked at them. Did you keep track of your score? The point of this, my friends, is not to make you feel so guilty that you become even more judgmental, particularly of yourself.

The point here is to make us aware of how our filters may be set. The assumptions that we make. The expectations we may have.

Many of which may be overly unfair or judgmental, particularly towards other people. And as you may have noticed, a judgmental attitude can be seen in more ways than simply jumping to conclusions about someone else.

When you may not really know them or their story. Can you recognize in yourself that you have come to conclusions or judgments of other people, and you may not even really know them that well?

[13 : 04] Certainly not well enough to know their story to make a judgment about them. Well, having completed that potentially uncomfortable exercise, let's look at the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

And this is another parable that features this theme of salvation, which is what we began last week. As we noted last time, there are different English translations of the Bible may have different names for different sections of Scripture.

There are subheadings throughout, likely throughout your Bible, that you may have noticed. Those little subheadings that you often find at the beginning of stories or passages to essentially set the stage for what is to come.

And while it's most often known as the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the parable we're looking at today is also sometimes known as the parable of the two men who prayed.

As we've noted previously, many of Jesus' parables are found in the Gospel of the Book of Matthew, but they're also found in other Gospels. And actually, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is found in the Book of Luke, chapter 18, verses 9 to 14.

[14 : 24] And as I touched on, this parable falls into this category of salvation. And it's a story Jesus told about the circumstances and perspectives on being saved from sin and entering into a relationship with God through Jesus.

That's salvation, as we understand it, right? So turn with me in your Bibles, fire up your Bible app on your smartphone, or feel free to listen as I read.

And remember, go ahead and post questions or comments if you're watching live right now, below the video. Luke 18, chapter 18, verses 9 to 14.

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable. Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself, God, I thank you that I'm not like all other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

[15 : 34] I fast twice a week, and I give a tenth of all I get. But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

I tell you, says Jesus at the end of this story, I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

If you've thought in the past, or maybe you're even thinking right now, I don't even really know what a Pharisee is. And a tax collector? Well, how bad could that be?

I mean, my cousin is an accountant, right? Is that maybe your context? Well, why did Jesus use a Pharisee and a tax collector as two characters in this story, the two main characters?

[16 : 45] Well, this is a study, my friends, in contrast, and also in challenging expectations. For Jesus' audience who would have been listening to this, a Pharisee was a religious leader, someone who would, in many ways, be the pinnacle of a devout and holy person, at least from other people's point of view, someone who knew the scriptures, someone who knew all the boxes that would need to be checked by someone who says they're seeking after God.

And in contrast, a tax collector? Well, he would be expected to be the villain of the story in many ways, the bad guy, someone who had collected taxes from the citizens to fill Roman treasuries.

Most likely a Jew, a Jewish citizen, a tax collector would be seen by his fellow Jews to be a traitor, someone who had betrayed their own people for personal gain.

Not someone who we'd expect to see in polite company, let alone visiting a temple with a pious kind of perspective, or not a pious, but a penitent kind of perspective that we see in this man.

Did you catch the nature of Jesus' audience for this parable? At least as Luke notes when he says it here, it says, some who were confident in their own righteousness.

[18 : 25] Well, we could argue, but isn't it good to be confident in our righteousness? Isn't it righteousness what we're supposed to be seeking in our lives? Well, righteousness is our goal for sure, but it's the kind of righteousness represented here that's the problem.

These folks, this audience, as Luke identifies them, were confident in their own righteousness.

There's a very strong, holier-than-thou sense there, isn't there?

Do you see that? But it gets worse. Not only were these people confident in their own righteousness, but we read, they looked down on.

They were judgmental of, to quote it says, everyone else. They looked down on everyone else. Ouch.

Self-righteous and judgmental. Not a super healthy or Christ-like combination, is it? We read that these two men went to the temple to pray, and they clearly, so they clearly both recognize a sense of duty, a sense of need for that.

[19 : 40] They're intentionally seeking to connect with God, or so it would seem. And here is where that stark contrast begins. We read that the Pharisee stood up and prayed about, do you remember?

Himself. This is not to suggest there's anything wrong with praying standing up. Pray standing up. Pray sitting down. Pray lying down. Pray in the morning.

Pray at night. It's not standing up that's the issue here. Nor is it asking God for help in our own life and circumstances. Praying about ourselves, or asking God to intercede for us personally.

There's nothing wrong with that. But it is absolutely about the attitude and perspective we bring when we pray. Let's explore the context together of the Pharisee's prayer.

He's not thanking God for what God has done for him. He actually comes right out and says, thank you God, that I'm not like all other men, is what he says.

[20 : 49] And boy, here's where the judgment starts to come in. The Pharisee categorizes all other men as robbers, evildoers, and adulterers.

I think that's a pretty broad statement, don't you? Especially when there's no possible way he could know the hearts and actions of every other man.

Oh, just when you think it can't get worse, it does. He even extends his judgment to a fellow worshiper who is in the temple with him. He makes the assumption that someone else who's in the temple to worship God, this tax collector, he says in his prayer, categorizing him already, he's making the assumption, first of all, that this tax collector is not only beneath him, but somehow less deserving of God's attention.

Somehow, fundamentally corrupt and beyond redemption by God. Not only has he thrown down a blanket assumption and judgment of pretty much, well, everyone but himself, he says all other men, right?

We read that. He goes on to explain in his prayer, and I use air quotes when I say prayer. It doesn't feel really much like a prayer. He explains or declares in this prayer why he is so worthy of God's attention.

[22 : 18] He brags about what he's done. Scripture tells us that God recognizes things done in secret. We are not to declare our worthiness, especially for attention for other people.

He brags that he fasts. He brags that he gives some of what he has back to God. You ever heard someone brag about what they do in, for, through a church, through a religious organization, through a charity, it's somewhat distasteful when you hear that.

I believe it is for me. There's no humility to that. There's no sense of context or perspective. It doesn't seem healthy to me. And so in this same prayer, not only has he judged other people, but he has justified himself before God.

He's declared himself to be better than everyone else and deserving of God's best because of what he personally has done. Yikes.

We can recognize in this story that the attitude of the Pharisee was what? This is where I would have audience participation if we were in person. And so we'll get back to that.

[23 : 34] But what was this attitude like? You can even say it in the comments. He's selfish, right? Entitled. Proudful. Self-interested.

Judgmental. Entitled. Arrogant. Lovely qualities, right? Absolutely. Oh dear. I don't know about you, but I actually cringe every time I read this parable and read that prayer because it makes me really uncomfortable.

Do you have friends who aren't Christians? I hope the answer is yes. Some of my non-Christian friends or even those who still have a personal faith but have walked away from a church, walked away from organized religion, have noted that it is this.

It is a sense of being self-righteous or better than others. A sense of being judged or criticized that has pushed them away or that even keeps them from engaging with a Christian community.

That's sad, isn't it? And it's something that I think we need to work to change. We need to seek God's direction and guidance making churches not what people perceive them to be.

[24 : 58] Well, let's change tracks a little bit now as the story moves to the tax collector. And remember, Jesus' listeners or Luke's readers would have had a preconception.

They may have already come to this story with a determination, a judgment on this tax collector based on, as I said before, who or what they would perceive him to be.

But in contrast to the Pharisee, we read the tax collector, remember, stood at a distance in the temple. Jesus said he would not even look up to heaven.

He was far more focused on his personal circumstances than those of anyone else. He wasn't looking around the temple judging people. He was recognizing that before God he was not worthy. He was penitent. He was confessing his sin. And he didn't seem interested at all, really, in comparing or judging anyone other than himself.

[26 : 04] Do you recognize that? We read in this passage, as I read it for us before, that he beat his breast. He was experiencing real physical distress, real emotional distress over what he knew he rightly deserved.

We talked about this a bit last week. What do we deserve? This tax collector was recognizing what justice would be for him, if not for a loving God.

His actions outwardly declare the state of his heart, his distress, beating his breast, a sense of conviction. And his words are so powerful.

God, have mercy on me, a sinner. The tax collector is clearly addressing God.

He's directly addressing God here. There's no sense of arrogance or self-righteousness, anything but. In fact, the tax collector not only recognizes his sin, but also that need, that desperate need for God's forgiveness, for God's mercy.

[27 : 20] He's not identifying himself as a person who is entitled to or deserving of anything other than punishment for his sin. The perspective and contrast here between these two men is so stark, isn't it?

It's critical for us to recognize Jesus' message in this parable. Our concern, our focus, our perspective, must be on the state of our own heart and our relationship with God.

Friends, God is not interested, let me be clear, not interested in our judgment of other people. He is definitely interested in our recognition of what we have done in our own lives.

And he's interested in seeing a sincere desire to return to him and to be forgiven, to seek forgiveness. Can you reflect back on the perspective that I hope we were all able to gain through those questions we answered, we considered at the beginning of the sermon?

Is your default switch, your default perspective, is it set to make assumptions about other people? Ask God to change that in you.

[28 : 52] if you view what you have done, your accomplishments, as somehow making you more worthy of receiving God's grace, God's forgiveness, recognize, friends, that perspective as being wrong.

And ask God to remind you that the only reason that we can stand before him is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

the only sacrifice, really, that could remove our sin. It was the only way to remove our sin and restore us into relationship with God.

When it comes to the idea of us being able to stand before God with any kind of self-generated righteousness, the Apostle Paul calls that out best in Romans 3, chapter 10.

Or, sorry, Romans 3, verse 10. When he says, quoting, he's actually quoting Psalm 14, verse 1-3. And Paul says, as it is written, and this is where it transitions to Psalm 14, 1-3, there is no one righteous, there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

[30 : 17] All have turned away. They have together become worthless. There's no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves.

Their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood.

Ruin and misery mark their ways. And the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Those are strong words, are they not? saying, my friends, that we're incapable of any kind of goodness. That's not what this is saying.

What it's saying is that anything that we can muster on our own, you may remember the Apostle Paul refers to all of his works, all of his achievements, as filthy rags compared to what Jesus has done.

[31 : 23] So what it's saying here is that anything that we can manage to muster on our own, especially with our tendency towards sin, it's likely not going to be all that great, to say the least.

So without question, each of us is deeply valued by God. We've been created by him in his image, and he loves us. But no one is righteous, no one is justified to stand before God solely based on their own merit.

It's not possible. Our righteousness, friends, comes only through Jesus, in Christ alone. And it's only through the sacrifice of Jesus that we can be redeemed.

We can be forgiven by God, that God will have mercy on me, a sinner, when we turn back to him in faith.

Paul states it a different way in 2 Corinthians 5, 21, chapter 5, verse 21. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him, in Jesus, we might become the righteousness of God.

[32 : 52] When we accept Jesus, we make an exchange. We exchange our sin for his righteousness. As one commentary I read put it so beautifully, our sin was poured into Christ at his crucifixion.

His righteousness is poured into us when we receive and declare him as Lord of our lives. Our sin was poured into Christ at his crucifixion.

His righteousness is poured into us when we receive and declare him as Lord of our lives. Friends, we have no hope of making this exchange on our own merit, based on anything that we have ever done or could possibly hope to do.

as that great hymn says, our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. We read that Jesus is very direct about the meaning of this story that he's told as he closes with these words, I tell you that this man, the tax collector, rather than the other, the Pharisee, went home justified before God.

[34 : 19] For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Friends, there's no debate here.

God is not interested in what we think of anyone else, or how much better we perceive we are than others, how much more deserving we may think we are.

We are all judgmental of other people in our own ways. You may think to yourself, oh, I'm not judgmental like anything Pastor Kent said.

Reflect. You may recognize intolerance, judgment, other things that, frankly, are maybe things that you do need to recognize, you do need to seek God's guidance on.

Friends, it's human nature to tend to be selfish when we're called to be selfless, to be critical when we're called to be kind, to be negative when we're called to be uplifting and encouraging to one another.

[35 : 33] In some ways, I believe those tendencies to judge, predetermine, I believe those things are the call of the world taking hold of our lives and our hearts.

Friends, God calls us to be different from the world. Can we remember and recognize that? My challenge for each of us is to seek, through God's strength, to resist the call of the world, to become people who reflect back a true and healthy perspective on Christianity, on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in and through our lives.

Amen. well, here we are at our last closing, our last sending song, our last benediction for an online service for the time being.

And so, I'm going back to a song that I have loved, that we have sung many times during our time online together, and that is I am resolved. And I am resolved that we're going to sing this song as we close our service.

I encourage you, friends, to be resolved to lean into God. Be resolved to stand firm and seek to grow deeper in your faith.

[36 : 58] Be resolved to stay connected through a local church. This pandemic is easing. Maybe now is the time that God is calling you to commit or recommit to being part of a church community where you can make a difference.

whether that's another church or our church, Braemar. If you have felt connected to us, I encourage you. I look forward to meeting you in person. I look forward to seeing so many people again that I have missed.

Zoom doesn't do it, always. Facebook video doesn't always do it. And so I look forward to in-person contact again. But after we sing this song together, my friends, may God richly bless your day and your week as you reflect on the truth that we've explored together today.

And remember that after this service, we'll be returning to in-person as of June 6th and we'll no longer have live services for the time being on Facebook.

So God bless you and I encourage you to continue to connect with us or begin to connect with us in the ways that I outlined for you at the beginning of the service.

[38 : 15] So God bless you as you sing this song. Blessings on you, blessings on your life and your family. I hope to see you in person and go in peace.

Amen. Amen. Him isn't so glad and free.

Jesus, greatest, highest, I will come to Thee. I am resolved to go to the Savior, leaving my sin and strife.

He is the true one, He is the just one, He hath the words of life. And I will hasten to Him, hasten so glad I'm free.

Jesus, greatest, highest, I will come to Thee. Amen.