

Finding Mercy

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[0:00] This morning, give your Bibles and invite you to turn to Luke chapter 18. If you're able to stand for the reading of God's Word, I ask that you would. If you don't have a copy, you can follow along on the screen there this morning.

It's been a wonderful day in the Lord's house already. Great singing. It's always an awesome thing to see the baptismal water stirred. But I'm thankful we can open up the Word of God. And we're walking through the Gospel of Luke. Really, Luke's Gospel is about this.

We have a Savior that seeks us. The Bible says in Luke 19.10, The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. And we're seeing that and we're looking here in the 18th chapter of this Gospel.

And Jesus is giving some parables to really kind of help us to evaluate where our life is. And so sometimes we read the parable and we think, well, that's not me. But I think we look a little bit deeper. We can see some things that will apply to our life.

So you found your place there in Luke chapter 18, verse number 9. We're going to read down to verse number 14. The Bible says this, And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.

[0:57] So Luke once again tells us, hey, this is what this is about. Verse number 10, Two men went up into the temple to pray. The one a Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus, notice this, with himself.

He thinks God's listening, but he's just praying to himself basically. God, I thank thee that I'm not as other men are. Extortioners, unjust, adulterers are even as this publican.

I fast twice in a week and give tithes of all that I possess. Verse 13 says, I want to preach a message this morning entitled this, Finding Mercy.

Mercy. I like mercy. You know, when the cop pulls you over because you were just going a little fast because Texans do, grace and mercy is what I'm looking for. Sometimes we look for it and we can't find it.

But listen, when Jesus shows up and we're seeking him, you know what you're going to find?

Mercy. He loves us. He's merciful. The Bible says, God who is rich in mercy.

[2:20] Maybe you hear this morning and think, I'm not sure if he has enough for me. He has plenty. And we're going to see how we can obtain it, how we can find it here in our text this morning. So let's go to the Lord today, ask him for help this morning.

Thank you, Lord, for this time together. Lord, thank you for the songs that remind us of what you've done for us. We are just in awe of your majesty. You're worthy of all of our worship.

Lord, because of what you've done for us. Lord, that you came to this earth not to be served, but to serve. Lord, to minister, to lay down your life as a ransom for many. Lord, that's what the cross of Calvary is all about.

And help us to see that today. Help us to realize that you came to give mercy. It's not hard to find, but we have to make sure we're trusting in the right things. Lord, I pray there's somebody here today that is trying to find it.

Maybe looking in other areas. Lord, would you direct their gaze to you? And they would come to the realization that the only thing that's really going to change their life is knowing you personally. And placing their faith in you.

[3:16] Lord, I pray you'd be with me now. You would just help me, Lord. You would give me the words. You would guide my thoughts. Empty me of self. Lord, forgive me of sin in my life. Lord, that I can be a help to your people today. And we ask it in Christ's name.

Amen. Thank you so much for standing. You may be seated. I'm sure you've noticed we live in a comparison culture. We compare everything. It doesn't matter if it's little kids or it's adults here today.

We compare houses and vehicles and jobs and kids. And, you know, I tell my kids, why can't you be like them? You know, things like that. Compare our kids. Compare vacations.

And the interesting thing about comparison is the result usually depends on who you compare yourself to. You know, you've got to kind of make yourself feel a little bit better.

I love playing golf and if I want to feel terrible about my golf game, I'm going to compare it to somebody like Scotty Scheffler. And you may not know who it is, but he's the number one golfer in the world. So if I compare myself to him, I'm terrible.

[4:16] So what I do is I just compare myself to Brother Garrett and I'm basically Scotty Scheffler. And that's kind of what it is. I love you, Brother Garrett. I mean, why would I compare myself to Scotty Scheffler?

That's really unnecessary discouragement. I mean, that's what this man does for a living. And he's done it for his whole life. And he's got coaches and trainers and people that help him even just mentally think about golf.

And we laugh at situations like that. But the reality is, as we come into our text, we can do the same thing spiritually in our life. We can view life the same way. And I would imagine most of us in here probably know that we're not perfect.

There's probably areas in your life, you know, I'm doing pretty good. But you could think of a few things. I could probably grow a little bit in this area. You know, I could probably be a little nicer here. I could probably respond better in these situations. But, you know, rather than looking at ourselves honestly before God sometimes, we just start looking around.

Let me find somebody that in our mind, in our estimation, I'm just a little better than. And we can judge ourselves on that. And once we find the right person to compare ourselves to, it's all gravy.

[5:23] We're feeling pretty good. Hey, we're not as bad as we initially thought we were. And that's really the heart that Jesus kind of confronts in our text today.

Because this isn't a 2026 problem. It was alive and well in the first century. And really it's been alive and well since there was people on the face of the earth. That we look around and we compare and we see here in verse 9 as we read the opening verse of our text.

Just like the parable we looked at last week of the persistent widow. Luke doesn't leave us to guess why Jesus told this story. He's telling this story and there would have been his disciples are gathered around.

But no doubt the Pharisees are there. Anytime Jesus starts gathering a crowd, the religious crowd comes. They want to see, hey, we got to catch this guy. I mean, he's going to say something wrong. I mean, we got to get rid of this nuisance.

And so Jesus tells them, hey, I'm going to tell this parable because there's people that believe they're really good. And because of that, they look down on other people. So he wanted to address that thought.

[6:23] And I don't want us to separate those two things. Because in our lives, when we become so impressed with our own righteousness, our own goodness, when we kind of think, hey, I'm doing okay, inevitably we're going to begin to look down on other people.

And think to ourselves. And we may not say it out loud. We may not even know what we're thinking. But we're thinking, at least I'm not that. Hey, I'm not perfect. But at least I'm not there. Hey, I would never do something like that.

But there's also an interesting kind of connection with this parable and the one that we looked at last week. Because both parables, if you remember last week if you were here, they both deal with prayer. In verses 1 through 8, we see this persistent widow.

And it shows us that we need to be persistent in prayer. And we come here, it's about prayer. But really what happens, the emphasis changes. Really the idea of what Jesus is pushing. The first eight verses, prayer really reveals what we believe about God.

Who we think he is and how he loves us. But here in this second parable that we're going to look at this morning, here's what prayer does. It reveals what we believe about ourselves. What we need and how we view others around us.

[7:37] And so Jesus puts these two men side by side. He puts this Pharisee and this publican. He sends them to the same place for the same purpose. They're going to the temple to pray.

And this would have been very common. This is what the Jewish people would have done. They would have went either in the morning around 9 or around 3. This was just what they did. But the Bible tells us, and Jesus leaves us in verse number 14, that when they leave, they both went to the same place, same thing, same prayers.

Not the same prayers, but they both went to pray. Only one of them goes home right with God. So how do we find mercy with God? What are we trusting in today to be right with God?

Because the big idea I want us to see in this text is this. Is that we are not made right with God by trusting in our own righteousness. By trusting in our own goodness. But by humbly trusting in his mercy.

And that's what Jesus is really pulling out in these few short verses. Which brings us to this question that I want us to answer this morning. What does Jesus teach us about being right with God?

[8:40] What does he teach us? What can we learn from this short little parable? I think the first thing he shows us is found in verse number 12. That self-righteousness, it looks at other people. That self-righteousness, it looks at other people.

Verse number 10. Two men went up into the temple to pray. The one a Pharisee and the other a publican. Now if you've been with us for a while in the Gospel of Luke and we're walking through this.

When we hear this story. When you read that verse right there. You immediately think, I know who the bad guy is in this story. That stinking Pharisee. They're always causing a problem.

Every time Jesus is teaching, they're showing up. And they're trying to trip him up. And they're coming up with all these riddles and all these tricks. And we know that the Pharisee is probably not a great guy. He doesn't care about the questions he asks.

He's just looking for a way to get to Jesus. But what I want us to do. And we have to remind ourselves when we go to the Bible. We have to go to the original audience. The context in the Bible is king.

[9:44] That this parable wasn't written directly to us. That Jesus is speaking this to them. And the original audience to them, this would have been a shocking comparison.

A Pharisee and a publican. Because on the one side, the Pharisees, they were known for their commitment to God. They were the cream of the crop. I mean, they looked like life was just gravy. They had it all together. They'd walk through town and walk real slow so everybody could see how beautiful they are and how religious they are. And they're really good at praying. And they pray real loud and use real big fancy words that they got off chat GBT.

You know, it's kind of one of those things. But that's how they lived their life. And they lived. We've seen already. They live for the applause of man. And if we were in the first century, we would have looked at them and said, wow.

I could never be that good. I mean, I could never be that religious. I mean, I can't even keep my life together. And they're tithing on everything that they have. And so in their minds, when a Pharisee would walk down the street, that was just the best of the best.

[10:52] And if you were looking for somebody who appeared serious about God, you didn't have to look any further. This was your man. But the Bible says there was also a publican.

See, a publican, another name for him would have been a tax collector. Anybody like tax collectors? Yeah, we don't really like them too much. But in this context, they were despised.

They were hated. Tax collectors were basically traitors. Kind of, I know history bores you, but you have to understand who they were. They were Jewish men who basically sold out to the Roman government.

The Roman government would come in and they would set up tax booths or franchises. Kind of like, you know, you start a restaurant franchise. You know, we need to get some of those coming in here. Texas Roadhouse. Bring a Texas Roadhouse in here.

It'll help Gainesville out. I just get that off my chest. Butter rolls and all those things. Man, it's good stuff. But they would apply for a franchise and they would become the manager of that.

[11:48] So basically, they're working for the Romans. They're Jewish people and they're ripping off their own countrymen. Because the Romans would say, okay, you have to bring us this much money in taxes.

Well, they would bring that much money. But anything above that, they just put in their pocket. So when they would show up to your business, they would show up to your house. They'd say, you owe this tax. Well, they'd pay Rome and they'd line their own pockets.

We're going to meet a man in a couple weeks named Zacchaeus. And he took a lot of money from a lot of people. But that's the kind of men that they were. And they were notorious for enriching themselves at the expense of their own people.

So they weren't just merely despised. They were traitors. Their testimony wasn't even allowed in court. Because they were not believable in anything they did.

So if Jesus would have stopped this parable right here in verse number 10 to the original audience and said, Hey, which one of these men do you think is right with God? Without hesitation, they would have said, the Pharisee.

[12:45] Because, I mean, a tax collector, there's no way they're ever getting into heaven. There's no way that they love God. I mean, the Pharisee was the religious man. He was the moral man. He was respectable.

And the publican, another name for him, was just a sinner. I mean, they walk by, look at that sinner. Hey, that guy ripped me off last year. That guy bankrupt my business. That's the type of man that he was.

But we know the rest of the story. We read it already. By the time Jesus is going to finish this text, he's going to turn their thinking on its head. See, at first, in verse number 11, it doesn't seem like the Pharisee is that bad a guy.

I mean, the Pharisee stood and prayed. Now, standing was an acceptable thing there in the temple. They would stand and they would pray. And he begins his prayer and he says, God, I thank thee. That seems like a good way to start a prayer.

And it's okay to pray those things. And there's nothing wrong to thank God for the grace he has in our lives. And he has some things that he's thankful for. But he said, I'm thankful I'm not like this and that.

[13:47] And if God has protected you from things in your life and a bad road you could have gone down, it's okay to thank God for that. God, thank you for protecting me from that, Lord. Thank you for, by your grace, that you changed the direction of my life.

I'm thankful God changed the direction of my life. I hope that you are as well. I'm thankful that God is working in my life. The problem is not thanking him. The problem is where this man's confidence lies.

Because you notice that little phrase, he stood and prayed with himself. He's very proud of himself. You know, if you want to know what he thinks about himself, just ask him. He'll tell you. Anybody ever met somebody like that?

You're like, I wonder what they think. Well, just ask him. They'll let you know what's going on. I mean, listen to that prayer again. Notice what he says. I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice in a week. I give tithes of all that I possess. I don't know about you, but it seems very self-centered prayer. It doesn't seem like he's humbly coming to God.

[14:52] He's very proud of the life that he lives. See, his prayer begins to God, or so he thinks, but it quickly becomes a celebration of all his goodness, of all his accolades in life.

There's no confession. There's no repentance. There's no plea for mercy. And why would there be? Because as far as he can tell in his life, he looks around.

He sees this publican. He sees other people and thinks, my life's good. I'm doing a lot better than him. I'm doing way better than him and obviously better than them. So why would he need mercy? Why would he need grace?

And we know how he thinks that because he compares himself. He says, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

This is a wild prayer to me. Can you imagine seeing this? He's praying a prayer and he's looking around and like, Lord, I thank you that I'm not like him. That's crazy.

[15:57] But you know what he was using? He was using kind of the dregs of society as his measuring stick. He's like, as long as I'm compared to them, man, I am perfect.

I mean, I don't do these things. I'm definitely not ripping off my fellow Jews because I'm a tax collector. We think, well, how does this really apply to us? Well, I don't think, I really hope that all of

us would never stand in church and say, God, I thank you that I'm better than everybody else here today.

I sure hope that you wouldn't stand up in this church and pray that prayer. We know better than that. But self-righteousness is usually a lot more subtle than that.

We mentioned it already, but here's what it sounds like. I know I'm not perfect, but at least. And anything that comes after, but at least, is going to really reflect what's in our heart.

That's kind of the idea that we see here. At least I don't do that. At least I come to church more than them. At least I'm not living the way that they are.

[17:04] And Jesus is telling us right now, that's not the comparison. That's not the measuring stick. See, the problem wasn't that everything that the Pharisee did was wrong. He did some good things.

I mean, he said this, I fast twice a week. That's pretty impressive. Some of y'all fast twice a day. Between breakfast and lunch, and between lunch and dinner.

But this guy was serious about fasting. And Pharisees were known they would fast on Monday and generally Thursdays. And, you know, when they fasted, they let everybody know they were fasting. You know, they would make their self look real bad.

And they walk around and mope, you know, like when your kids are starving to death because they haven't had a snack in five minutes. It looks like that. I'm just fasting because I love the Lord so much. That's kind of the idea that they had in their life.

The Bible says this. He gave tithes of all that he possessed. And they took that literally. It wasn't just when the paycheck came in, he said, okay, I'll give a little bit of tithe.

[18:02] I'll give it to the synagogue. No, if somebody gave him spices, if they gave him anything, they would take a tenth of everything. They would tithe on everything they had.

And they did it for a show. And let me just remind you, fasting's not wrong. Jesus tells us there's some things we need to fast about. Because here's the reality of fasting. Fasting says, Lord, I need you more than I need this.

It's to kind of put our focus on there's nothing wrong with fasting. There's nothing wrong with giving. Living morally. He was a good man morally speaking. We should be moral people. There's nothing wrong with that.

But here's the thing. Good things weren't the problem. The problem was is that good things were the basis of his confidence in God. He didn't need God.

He said, God, look, you have me. How awesome am I? That's his mindset. He said, God, that he was God's gift to everybody else.

[18:57] That everybody could look at him and say, well, as long as I, if I could just get to his level, then God would really love me. And don't miss the warning that we see. Because it's easy to kind of run past us and say, well, that's definitely not me.

And I think we would probably agree this morning that it's by the grace of God that we are what we are. The fact that we know the Lord is our Savior and the fact that you have blessings in your life, it's nothing you've done.

No, it's what God has done in your life. But if we're not careful, we can slowly begin treating God's grace like our accomplishment. Well, look what I did right here.

And look at this. And look how God's blessed me here. And really we're saying, I did this and I bought that and I worked hard for that. Listen, that's the same mindset that this man was in. See, we can look at someone whose struggle is a lot more visible than ours, that seems a lot more messier than ours.

And instead of seeing someone that desperately needs grace, we just look at somebody that makes us feel better about our own life. And Jesus says, that's wrong. That's not where you live. That's not what I've called you to do.

[20:05] Here's what that is. Self-righteousness. That's what that is. And Jesus says, that has no place in your life. Really, the entire Sermon on the Mount, when you read Matthew 5, 6, and 7, he's saying, get rid of self-righteousness and replace it with true righteousness.

And that true righteousness comes from Christ and Christ alone. See, the problem when we begin to be self-righteous and we look around at other people, the Pharisee didn't need to be perfect. He just needed to find somebody a little worse than him.

And that's real easy to do in life. We don't have to look real hard. We can find somebody that we think in our mind is that one. But the enormous problem with that line of thinking is this. Other people aren't the standard. God is. That's the standard. That's the mark. Because you go to Matthew 5. Jesus says, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees, you can't make it to heaven.

He's saying, well, I thought we weren't supposed to be like him. Here's what Jesus is saying. They're not the bar. I am. It's not about what you do. It's about what I'm going to do for you.

Because the Bible is still very clear.

[21:10] That all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Here's what this verse is saying. The standard isn't the Pharisee. The standard isn't the publican.

The standard isn't the person sitting next to you this morning. The standard isn't that co-worker. That co-worker. Here's the standard. The glory of God. Does your life match up on that level? I think we would all agree here this morning, no, it does not.

Because there's only one God. And it's not us. It's God alone. And when that's the standard, when the glory of God is the standard, all the comparisons that we have in life are going to crumble.

They're going to turn to dust. Because somebody else's sin may make yours look a little bit smaller. Well, I'm not that bad a sinner. But their sin doesn't make you righteous.

And that's what Jesus is exposing here. He already told us. Because in verse number 9, he told this parable because there was people that trusted in their righteousness and despised others.

[22:14] Because of the comparison, they thought, I'm good. I don't have to do anything else in life. See, self-righteousness, it doesn't just distort how we see ourselves. It distorts how we see other people.

How we view them. How we interact with them. But here's kind of the irony of this first part of this text. Is the Pharisee was actually much closer to the publican than he ever realized.

In fact, they have much more in common than anybody else. Why? Because they were both sinners. They both needed mercy. They both needed righteousness that they could never produce themselves.

But here's the difference. Only one of them realized it. He didn't think he needed it. See, everything changes when Jesus turns our attention to this other man.

See, this self-righteous Pharisee, he came to the temple with what he thought was a prayer. But really, it was a resume. He's saying, here's my resume of why I'm better than everybody else. The apostle Paul had a resume like that before he came to Christ.

[23:18] Read Philippians chapter 3, the first eight verses. Paul said, here's my resume. This is why I was better than everybody else. But then Jesus showed up. And my resume was worth nothing. He came with a resume.

But we see this publican in verse number 13. He just comes with a need. And while self-righteousness looks at others, number two, we see this. Humility looks to God.

Humility looks to God. Let's read verse 13 again. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes into heaven, but smote upon his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

What a contrast. I mean, the Pharisee had plenty to say. Maybe this was just like a Cliff Notes version of his prayer. Maybe he would overemphasize all of it.

But, I mean, he wanted everybody to hear, this publican can barely get a sentence out. I mean, this Pharisee is looking around while he's praying and thinking of all the things. And it's just coming to him, oh, I'm not like him and I'm not like him.

[24:21] This publican won't even lift his eyes towards heaven. This Pharisee is thinking about everything that he's done right. And this publican just thinking of what he desperately needs.

He knows who he is. And notice a couple things Jesus tells us about this publican. He begins by telling us he was standing afar off. The idea is we don't know exactly where he's standing, but it's kind of like he just slipped into the synagogue.

He just slipped into the temple. He knew he probably wasn't welcome there. He was hoping nobody would see him. And so he just kind of stood right there at maybe the very back. Kind of stood in the corner. You know, it wasn't probably well lit like this.

And he's just trying to kind of maybe hide in the shadows a little bit. That's not how the Pharisee rolled. He went right in the middle, probably brought his own spotlight with him. And, you know, had

a little fog machine and all the things so everybody could see what he was.

That's not this man. The idea we see in verse 13, he's trying not to be noticed. He doesn't want anybody to know he's there. Because he knows he's not liked by anybody.

[25 : 23] I mean, maybe his own mama doesn't like him. We don't know. But he's not walking into the temple thinking, God's probably pretty glad I'm here. I mean, I'm pretty awesome.

That's not the mindset that this man has. That's not what he's thinking. He knows who he is. He knows why he came. And he also knows this. He has no grounds to have confidence in anything he's done.

Because everything he's done is probably against the law. It's probably against what God would want him to do. That's what Jesus says. He wouldn't even lift his eyes up to heaven. See, his physical posture, it shows what he felt in his own heart.

This idea of not even lifting up. You know, when you were in trouble when you were a kid, hypothetically speaking, none of us were probably ever in trouble. And my dad would say this, look at me. And I'll look.

You know, maybe you have a dog like that. You know, even dogs know this. You're like, what did you do? Like, look at me in the eyes. And there's like chocolate all over their face. You're like, oh, man.

[26 : 28] That's the idea here is there's a shame in his life. He knows. He's broken. There's this awareness that he is guilty. He might be in the temple, but he's thinking, I'm not sure God can even love me.

I know what I've done. And then Jesus says this, that he smote upon his breast. He was kind of hitting himself. This isn't some casual emotion. No, this man is deeply grieved by his life.

He wouldn't lift his eyes. He's saying, God, just be merciful to me. I hope you see the emotion that is there and the feelings that are in his life. And notice this. He never mentioned the Pharisee.

He didn't look around and say, at least I'm not like that guy. No, he doesn't compare. He doesn't make excuses. He doesn't feel the need to explain himself. He has stopped defending himself before God.

You know what that is? That's genuine repentance. That's what that looks like. Repentance doesn't say, God, I know I was wrong, but you have to understand and start telling that.

[27 : 32] We've all been in that spot. Maybe a boss said something. Maybe a parent said something to you or your kids. And you say, well, I know I shouldn't have done that, but. And we begin to give all the reasons why we did what we did. Here's what real repentance looks like.

We come to God and say, I'm sorry, Lord. We have no excuses. This is repentance stops making excuses. And here's what it does. It agrees with God about your sin. God, I'm a sinner.

That's why he said, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. God, I know what your word says. I've heard it my whole life. That's what this man's saying. And you know what? That's me. And I'm tired of living this way.

I'm tired of always trying to do things and trying to maybe, trying to be a better person. It's not working, Lord. What a prayer. No resume.

No list of accomplishments. No comparisons. Just a man pleading for mercy. Coming to the Lord with a broken heart.

[28 : 31] And this idea of being merciful, it carries the thought of atonement. Of sin being dealt with so a sinner can stand right before God.

The idea that we see in our text is this. This is not a one-time prayer like, Lord, forgive me. I won't ever do this again. And he's going to go live it that way. He's saying, Lord, I want you to change my life. I want you to do what I cannot do.

I've tried and I failed and I failed. Lord, I need your mercy. Remember where this man is. He's in the temple. And in this time, the temple would have been the place where sacrifices were offered.

Where blood was shed. Where the atonement for the people were made. And here stands a man guilty who knows he cannot fix the wrong between him and his God. And his prayer isn't saying, God, if you just be kind to me and overlook my sins, we'll be all good.

No, it's a plea. God, can you do what I cannot do? That's the prayer. God, I need you. And see, that's the difference between these two men.

[29 : 34] The Pharisee came into the temple telling God all the good things he's done. And some of them were good. But this publican comes in depending on only what God could do.

Now, that's where we have to live. See, humility isn't walking around saying, I'm terrible and I'm worse than everybody.

God is not saying we all have to have the Eeyore syndrome. If you don't know what Eeyore is, go watch Winnie the Pooh. Eeyore just, everybody, you've seen him.

That's not what humility is. It's not saying that we have to have this syndrome and think, well, if we just beat ourselves up and we just remind God and ourselves every single day that we're worthless and we're terrible and we can't do anything.

No, no. Humility is not thinking you're worse than everybody else. Humility, real biblical humility, realizes that comparing yourself to everybody is beside the point. Your comparison is not around who you can find worse than you.

[30 : 36] It's when you come to God. And when you see God for who he is, you really see you for who you are. And the fact that even when you see that and you come to this realization, God still loves me, that should humble you.

That God cares for you. See, the publican isn't concerned whether he's better or worse than the Pharisee. No, he's standing before God and he knows this. I have no chance unless he's merciful for me.

And he says, God, be merciful. That's the only hope that he has. And may I remind us, that's where all of us stand. That we don't have anything to bring to God.

That we're empty handed. Before we know Christ is our Savior, we are spiritually bankrupt. We don't bring anything to the table like, God, I'm going to bring this and if you bring that, then I'll make it to heaven.

No, here's what you bring, sin. That's what we brought to the table. And here's what Jesus brought. He brought his own precious life. The sinless, spotless Lamb of God. And he laid down his life willingly for us.

[31 : 37] And when we see somebody struggling in sin, our response shouldn't be, man, I'm glad I'm not like them. No, I think it should be this. They need the same mercy that I need. Because let me remind you, if you know Christ is your Savior and that God saved you, he can save anybody.

That's what humility looks like. That's how we view our own life. And that's where this story kind of reaches a shocking conclusion. God gives the verdict.

So we see this number three as we come to a close here. That grace makes sinners right with God. That grace makes sinners right with God.

Verse 14, I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. Don't let our familiarity maybe with this story take the shock out of those words.

Remember at the very beginning we said, to us, we know who the bad guy is. But when Jesus says, I tell you, this man, which man? The publican, the tax collector, the sinner, the one that was hated by society.

[32 : 42] Jesus says, this man went home justified. That would have just blown their minds. I don't think they wore socks back then because they wore sandals too because that was a fashion faux pas.

But if they had socks, they would have been knocked off. I mean, think about it. I don't know if we really grasp what he's saying in this context. And the Pharisee, they're thinking to themselves, the Pharisee?

The religious, the moral, the praying man? He didn't go home justified? If he can't go home justified, who can be right with God? That's kind of their mindset. See, the man that everybody expected to be right wasn't.

And the one person they thought there's no chance on God's green earth that they're ever going to make it into heaven, that's the one that went home right with God. Why? How is this possible?

Well, one trusted in his own righteousness and the other trusted in God's mercy. And I don't want us to run past that word justified. It doesn't mean that the publican went home feeling better about himself.

[33 : 45] Jesus isn't saying, well, he got it off his chest now and he just feels a little bit better about his life. No, here's what justified means. It's a deep theological term. It's to be declared righteous before God.

See, he walked into that temple guilty. And he knew it. He knew he was a sinner. He knew that he had to pay the price. But when he walked home, he was declared clear.

Just as if he's never sinned. He came there knowing he had no righteousness to offer. There was no good in his life. And yet he left, robed in the righteousness of God and standing with God that he can come boldly before his throne.

How is that possible? Here's how it's possible. Righteousness isn't achieved. It's only received.

That's what scripture teaches. You look at every great man and woman in the Bible.

They didn't just earn it. No, they received it from God. It's by his mercies that we're made new.

That's the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Pharisee asked God for nothing.

[34 : 48] And here's what he got. Nothing. It wasn't that God didn't want to offer it to him. But he didn't think he needed it. He didn't ask for it. And the publican asked God for mercy. And he received everything and more.

Brother. That's what God wants for you. That's why God came. That's why Jesus Christ died on the cross. We already said Romans 3.23. But listen to the very next verse. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.

You cannot earn it. You do not deserve it. It cannot be achieved. It is only by his grace. It's free to you. But it cost him his life on the cross of Calvary. That's why he came.

See, we can look at the back to the cross and see exactly how God provided it. Jesus dying in the place of sinners. He bore in his body our sin.

And the righteousness that we could never produce in ourselves. Here's what Jesus says. You can have mine. Why don't you come into the family? Hey, I did that for you. Every time you look at a cross, that's your cross.

[35 : 51] Yet Jesus took your place. And it really exposes the tragedy here in the life of the Pharisee. He stood in the temple in the place where sinners came seeking mercy and never even asked for it.

What a sad, sad reality. It wasn't because mercy wasn't available. He was just convinced, I don't really need it. I got a pretty good life.

I'm better than these people. And you'll never find mercy when you're busy proving you don't need it. That's what we see here in this text. That's what Jesus reminds us.

And Jesus closes this out with an axiom there at the end of verse number 14. For everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

You see, Jesus has moved from the Pharisee and the publican. Now he's talking to all of us.

Anybody that's reading this text. Everyone. That includes all of us here in this room this morning.

[36 : 57] The one who exalts himself, here's what's going to happen. They'll be brought low. But the one who humbles himself, here's what Jesus is going to do. Lift us up. He's going to take care of us.

And we've seen this reversal throughout the Gospel of Luke. The kingdom of God does not operate according to the values of the world. It doesn't say, wow, he's successful. He's got it all together. He prays really good.

He's automatically going to heaven. That's not how it works. No, you know who gets into heaven? People have said, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. That's how you get there. When you realize who you are and what your sin did.

See, the world says prove yourself, promote yourself, show all what you've accomplished. But grace says this, why don't you come empty-handed and let God fill your life up? Why don't you come with nothing?

I don't know about you, but that's difficult to do. I like to have something to bring. I like to say that, man, I did that. Every time I do a honey-do list, man, I want her to know about it.

[37 : 54] I'm like, hey, you see that over there? This guy did that. Of course, it's wrong, and then she goes and fixes it. But it doesn't matter. I did it. I at least attempted to do it. I mean, we like to say things, you know, hey, God, this is why I'm worthy.

You know, here's why I'm different than so-and-so. Here's why you should accept me, but you can't receive grace while you're insisting that you earned it. That's what we see here.

And before we leave these two men at the temple, I want us to let Jesus' parable here examine us. Because sometimes it's really easy to hear a message like this or read a parable like this and think, man, I know somebody just like that Pharisee.

It's probably the person in the mirror. God didn't give this parable for other people. He gave it for us to look at our own life and to see what we think about ourselves.

See, we can become the Pharisee while congratulating ourselves that we're not the Pharisee. We don't want to live there. That's what God has called us to be. See, Jesus didn't give this parable so we can diagnose other people's problems.

[39:03] He gave it so we would examine our own heart. So let me ask you this question. When you think about your own standing before God right now, if you were to stand before the Lord today, and we could.

We don't know. He could come back or, you know, our time. We don't know how much time we have. What is your confidence? What gives you confidence to stand before God Almighty, the creator of the universe?

I ask people this all the time. Do you know the Lord as your Savior? Here's what they say. Well, I'm a good person. That's what you're going to go with for your confidence for all of eternity.

I grew up in church. Hey, church is a good thing. I like church. I like being here. Well, I got baptized. I'm thankful Brother Cole got baptized today.

But I said at the beginning, I'll remind us again. Baptism doesn't save you. It's just showing, hey, I was saved. Christ changed my life, and I want everybody to know about it. See, those all may be good things, but here's the problem.

[40:02] Good things make terrible saviors. What are you trusting in? Where's your confidence? If you were to stand face-to-face to God, what would you say? Two men walked into the temple.

Same temple. Same God. Same stated purpose. Both prayed. Both walked home. But only one's life was changed. What made the difference?

I mean, they're both sinners. The only difference was one of them knew they needed mercy. We're in the same place. You've heard the same songs.

The same message. Don't walk out of this door saying, well, at least I'm doing better than so-and-so. Hey, I came today, so that's got to count for something. Listen, I'm thankful you're here. I'm thankful whether you've been a member for 40, 50 years or it's your first time.

I'm thankful you're here. But being here doesn't save you. And it just keeps bringing us back to this question. What am I trusting to make me right with God? Your goodness?

[41:04] Your religion? Listen, religion doesn't get you into heaven. Religion's never saved anybody. Coming to a Baptist church, going to any other country, it doesn't save you. Here's what saves you, Jesus Christ. A relationship with him saves you.

You trust in some good accomplishments, giving to some charity, doing some work for others.

Those are good things, and God's not against us. Do those things. But see, the beauty of this parable is it teaches us you don't have to convince God that you're good enough.

He knows who you are. You can just stop pretending. You can stop comparing yourselves, and you can just come honestly before God, and here's what you're going to find, mercy.

It's not some weird hidden thing. Jesus says, come, I'll give it to you. But God, who is rich in mercy, he wants to give it to you today.

I'll leave you with this thought. We don't come to God proving our goodness. We must come to him admitting our need for mercy. Would that be our life today?

[42:08] Are we looking at other people, or are we looking at God? Which one are, who are we? Are we the Pharisee, or are we the publican? Where we stand with our heads.