

AM Luke 18:9-16

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[0 : 00] Romans, and we're going to reach from Romans chapter 3. So Romans chapter 3, I think if you've got the same Bible as I have, it's page 1133, 1133.

In the church Bible. So Romans is a book, it's a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome.

And early on in chapter 1, he really sets the theme of the book in verse 16 of chapter 1. He says, I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. And the book is what really sets the theme.

It's about the gospel, the gospel which is about the righteousness of God. And gospel means good news. So we'll take up the reading in chapter 3, verse 9.

[1 : 28] And he says, As it is written, None is righteous.

No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless.

No one does good. Not even one. Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips.

Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery.

And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law.

[2 : 41] So that every mouth may be stopped. And the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by the works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight.

Since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law.

Although the law and the prophets bear witness to it. The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And are justified by his grace. And are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood. To be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness.

[3 : 46] Because in his divine forbearance. He had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time. So that he might be just.

And the justifier. Of the one who has faith. In Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded.

By what kind of law? By a law of works? No. But by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith.

Apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes. Of Gentiles also?

Since God is one. Who will justify the circumcised by faith. And the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?

[4 : 47] By no means. On the contrary. We uphold the law. May God bless to us that reading of his word.

People coming to church one Sunday morning. One of them. We'll call him Mr. X. Is a very familiar figure.

He never misses a service. And he's there today with his wife and his family. They're a lovely family. And Mr. X is a great family man.

They've all cycled to church this morning. Because they keep their carbon footprint low. And Mr. X is involved in lots of different charities.

In fact he's come to church that morning. Straight from a breakfast for homeless people. And he actively supports lots of different charities.

[5 : 44] And also all the right political causes. During the service his mind wanders over his life. And he feels really quite pleased with how he's doing.

I'm really doing a lot better than a lot of other folk here. He thinks. And he quietly says to himself. Thank you God.

The other person. We'll call him Mr. Y. Is very different. He can't remember the last time he was in church. Indeed if he ever has been in church before. He doesn't really know what you're meant to do in church.

He's just not used to it. There's a smell of alcohol still on his breath. And Mr. Y has never done an honest day's work in his life.

He's a total waster. Currently he's making ends meet by drug pushing. And through his life he's used and abused too many people to count.

[6 : 51] He's known in the town as a violent thug. And he staggers into church. And sits down and groans. Oh God help me.

Please please forgive me. Which of these two do you think God will accept? Well I'm sure some of you by now have reminded you of a story which we're going to read now.

From the Gospel of Luke. Chapter 18. It's on page 1056. Of the church bible. And this is a. Sort of in the. Sometime in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. And his teaching. So we're reading from Luke chapter 18 verses 9 to 14.

Jesus also told this parable. To some who trusted in themselves. That they were righteous.

[7 : 55] And treated others with contempt. Two men went up into the temple to pray. One a Pharisee. And the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee. Standing by himself. Prayed thus. God I thank you. That I am not like other men. Extortioners.

Unjust. Adulterers. Or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. 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. I tell you. This man. Went down to his house. Justified.

[8 : 52] Rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself. Will be humbled. But the one who humbles himself. Will be. Exalted.

Now you might. You may wonder why I sort of told. Well a sort of modern church. Version of the story. At the beginning. And the reason I did that.

Was because the original. Shock. Of the parable. Is. To some degree lost on us. If we read. The gospels at all. We.

We. Tend to think of the Pharisees. In a negative light. We think of them as being self-righteous. As being legalistic. And. And also we know that they are the guys.

Who often were opposed. To Jesus. So. We don't really think that well. Of Pharisees. But that is not how they were judged. How they were viewed. At the time Jesus told.

[9 : 50] This parable. When Jesus told this parable. Pharisees were thought of as being. Really good people. They were the ones who were really serious. About keeping.

God's laws. They were the ones who tried really really hard. To do the right thing. And. Tax collectors. For us today.

A tax collector. Well. Maybe working for the inland revenue. It's just a job. We don't think of it. In a particularly negative light. But in that time. Tax collectors were.

Collaborators. With the Roman Empire. Who ruled. Over Palestine. At that time. And they were also. Very often corrupt. And greedy. And so tax collectors.

Were really. The lowest. Of the low. So when. The Lord. Jesus tells this story. At the end of which. The tax collector.

[10 : 46] Rather than the Pharisee. Is accepted. By God. As righteous. That would have been shocking. To the original audience. And. It was meant. To be shocking.

I'm so much better than he is. There's one problem. And that is that the pass mark for this particular exam is 100%. And so it makes little difference whether someone gets 95% or 5%.

[16:36] The point is we both fail the exam. And you see, we can very easily compare ourselves with other people and feel that we are doing better than they are.

And so we look down on them. But what really matters is how we compare with God's perfect standard. God demands perfect obedience from us.

And that is his right. He made us. These lives that we are living are given to us by God. We're not ultimately our own.

We belong to God. And we owe our lives to God. And not only our lives, our time, our money, the resources that we have, everything that we have, everything that we are, we owe to God, our maker and our sustainer.

At the beginning, we're told that Jesus told this parable to some who looked down on everyone else or showed contempt towards other people.

[17:46] And there are lots of reasons why we might look down on others. I wonder who you are inclined to look down on. And maybe you don't put it quite like this, but if we were putting ourselves in the Pharisees' shoes, we would say, God, I thank you that I'm not like other people.

Thank you that I'm not like those nasty right-wing people. Or thank you that I'm not like those naive, stupid lefties. Or thank you that I'm not like those wishy-washy liberal Christians. Or thank you that I'm not like those bigoted, fundamentalist Christians.

Thank you that I'm not like those who don't share my insights. Who don't maybe bring up their children the way I do. Thank you that I'm not like them.

And of course, the list can go on and on and on. We can look down on people for all sorts of reasons. I wonder who you look down on and why.

It's so easy to look down on other people and to congratulate ourselves in comparison with them. And it's something that is, I think it's almost universal.

[18:56] Whether you're religious or whether you're secular, whatever religious background you're from, we all have this tendency to look down on other people and compare ourselves favourably with other people.

And that is what this Pharisee was doing. He was comparing himself with evildoers, with thieves, with adulterers and tax collectors. And he's also really proud of his religious observance.

He says, I fast twice a week and I give a tenth of all I get. That was more than what the law required. The law, the Torah, only required fasting for Jews one day of the year.

But he fasts twice a week. And it seems that this Pharisee thinks that God will accept him because of the righteousness that he has gained by these religious acts.

And because he has avoided the sins of other people. And yet, at the end of the story, Jesus says that the Pharisee was not justified before God.

[20:03] He was not acceptable to God. He was proud of his deeds and his religious observance. And this pride was offensive to God. And as the Lord Jesus says, all those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

Well, let's move on to look at the tax collector. Tax collectors were hated at the time of Jesus. Because, as we've mentioned, Palestine was occupied by the superpower of the time, the Roman Empire.

And so tax collectors worked for the Romans. They collected taxes for the Romans. So people thought of them as traitors. And they also tended to get rich at the expense of ordinary people. And so they were deeply unpopular. They were the lowest of the low. And Jesus' audience might have been surprised to hear of such a man even going to the temple at all to pray.

But on this occasion, he goes along with the Pharisee and along with the rest of the worshippers to pray. And his prayer is short and simple.

[21:13] But it comes from the heart. We see, first of all, it's a humble prayer. We see that in his body language. He stands at a distance from the rest of the worshippers.

He doesn't feel worthy to be part of them. He also, he's looking down. He won't lift his eyes to heaven. Then he's looking down because he's ashamed, deeply ashamed of his life and of his sins. And he strikes his chest as a sign of his sorrow and pain. In the Middle East, striking your chest is a sign of mourning. And he was mourning not over the death of someone, but over his own sins.

And he describes himself as, in the original, it's actually the sinner. God have mercy on me, the sinner. And like the Pharisee, he's not thinking about other people's sins. What matters are his own sins. But it's also a believing prayer. The tax collector's prayer expresses his faith in the fact that God is merciful.

[22 : 29] The basic meaning of mercy is not receiving something bad that we deserve. And this man knows that he deserves God's judgment, God's punishment.

But he pleads for God's mercy. In fact, the word that's translated, be merciful, is actually a very interesting, very significant word in the original.

It's different from the word in verses 38 and 39, where Jesus passes a blind beggar.

And in verse 38, the blind beggar cried, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Now that's a different word. That has the sense of pity, have pity on me.

Some translations translate it. But this word that this tax collector uses, have mercy on me, it has the sense, the meaning of, let your anger be removed from me.

[23 : 33] Or make atonement for me. And that's really significant when we consider where these prayers are being said.

And at this point, the story I told at the beginning kind of breaks down. Because a church is not the same as the temple. The temple, I guess the equivalent then would have been a synagogue.

Which there were lots of synagogues in different towns and villages among the Jews. But the temple, there was only one of it. And that was where sacrifices were made. And remember the Pharisee and the tax collector are in the temple in Jerusalem.

And as we noted earlier, at both the morning and late afternoon prayers, a lamb was sacrificed to God as a burnt offering. So the tax collector would see the priest place his hands on the head of the lamb.

And that most likely symbolized that the sins of the people were being placed onto the lamb. And then the lamb is killed.

[24 : 41] It's slaughtered. Its blood is drained and sprinkled on the altar. And then the lamb's body is cut up in pieces. And nearby there's a fire on the top of an altar.

The fire is burning and the pieces of the lamb are placed on the altar fire. And the smoke rises as those pieces of the lamb are burned up.

And this tax collector, he watches all of this take place. And he understands what the sacrifice means. In the Old Testament law, in the Torah, God himself had commanded the children of Israel to offer these daily sacrifices.

And God had said that he would accept these sacrifices to make atonement for the people. For their sins. And the priest had symbolically placed the sins of the people on the lamb.

And then the life of the lamb is given up as a ransom. Sacrifice which sets the people free. The lamb takes the anger of God which is against their sins.

[26 : 03] Now some people might think, well, is God angry? Is that not unworthy of God? But anger is not always a negative thing. There are some human situations which call for anger.

So if you hear, say, a report of maybe children who have been sold into slavery and prostitution. The correct response to that is not indifference.

It's anger. And against so many other dire abuses against people. And in the same way, God's anger against sin is righteous against human sin.

It's a righteous anger. But this lamb sacrifice, it symbolizes the taking away of God's anger against sin. The lamb dies instead of the sinners.

The lamb dies as a ransom in their place. But the tax collector stands there at a distance apart from the other worshippers.

[27 : 05] And he's aware of his own sins. And he wants more than anything else to be right with God. And in the pain that he feels for his own sins, he strikes his chest and he cries out, Oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Let this sacrifice be for me. Let it cancel my sin. Let it remove your anger from me. Let it cancel my sin. Let it cancel my sin. Let it cancel my sin.

And Jesus Christ tells us that this man's prayer is answered. He gets what he asks for. At the end of the parable, both men go home from the temple.

The Pharisee goes home unchanged. He has seen the lamb being sacrificed. But he receives no benefit from it. His sins have not been forgiven.

Because he has not repented. In fact, he doesn't even seem to realise that he has sins from which he needs to repent, to turn. But the tax collector goes home justified before God.

[28 : 13] Righteous in the sight of God. That means that his sins are forgiven. And that God regards him as righteous. It means that before God, the judge of all people, the verdict is given, not guilty.

Now that is amazing. Because the tax collector is guilty. He admits he is guilty. He calls himself the sinner. And yet God declares him not guilty.

That's what the word justified means in verse 14. That he's declared not guilty. How can God call a sinner righteous and yet be a just God?

How can God justify a sinner and still be just? Well, it's on the basis of this lamb that is sacrificed in the temple that God can forgive guilty sinners and at the same time be just.

The tax collector's sins have been punished symbolically by the lamb. And so God's justice is satisfied. But the tax collector himself does not receive the punishment.

[29 : 30] In his mercy, God provides a lamb sacrifice which takes the punishment for the tax collector's sins and dies in his place. In the Old Testament law in the Torah, God commanded animal sacrifices to be made in order to teach that God is holy and just and that sins must be punished.

But also those sacrifices teach that God is merciful. And that in his mercy God provides a sacrifice to take the punishment for sins in the place of sinners.

Now Jesus told this story when the temple was still standing and still in operation. And the sacrifices that were offered there daily to God in the temple they were signs they were pointers they weren't those lambs daily sacrificed in themselves couldn't deal with sins they couldn't take away sins but they were signs signs that pointed forward to an ultimate and real sacrifice for sins that would take place shortly after Jesus told this story.

When John the Baptist introduced Jesus to others he announced him in these words he said behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world that is how he introduced Jesus and that language is the language of sacrifice Jesus is that Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world in fact a few just a few verses after this parable Jesus predicts not for the first time he predicts his own death which took place shortly after he told this parable and Jesus Christ was killed by evil people and yet his death was in the plan and purpose of God from the very beginning God had planned that Jesus Christ the beloved son the eternal word the lord of all would die the ultimate and real sacrifice that would take away sins and Jesus does that not as some third party it's not as if you have

God on the one hand and then human beings and then Jesus as a third party no Jesus Christ is God himself in Jesus Christ God himself personally pays our debt and dies in our place so how can our sins be forgiven well our sins can be forgiven today because of God's merciful provision of a sacrifice to take away our sins and that is in his provision of the Messiah Jesus but we must respond to God's mercy the Pharisee was there in the temple and he saw the sacrifice of the lamb as a burnt offering to God but it did him no good because he failed to recognize that he actually needed mercy and he needed forgiveness and instead he presented his own efforts at good deeds and religion to God and God did not accept him but the tax collector was justified before God his sins were forgiven that was not because he managed to somehow make amends for his sins somehow managed to make his good deeds outweigh his bad deeds it was because he repented and put his faith in the mercy of God he put his faith in the sacrifice God had provided to ransom him at the end of the story

[33 : 45] Jesus Christ applies it to every one of us that all those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted the Pharisee and the tax collector are examples of two kinds of people the proud and the humble and the challenge for each of us is which one are we like are we like the Pharisee or like the tax collector now what about those of us who maybe identify with the Pharisee or with the first man in the story I told at the beginning maybe we're people who other people look on as good nice people the sort of neighbors that anyone would be allowed to have the sort of citizens that our country needs more of respectable moral upright people how can we develop humility humility before God

I think the answer or one answer is to talk to yourself and remind yourself of certain things first of all remind yourself that everything I have is given by God it's a gift of his grace and even if it seems that I've achieved much in my life the abilities to achieve the opportunities to achieve the favorable

circumstances the education I've had the measure of health and so much more all of these are given to me by God they're not something that is my virtue they're all gifts and so if I compare myself favorably with someone else and maybe they have not had my advantages in life maybe if I'd had their circumstances I would have done worse than they would have done Jesus elsewhere said to whom much is given much more will be required and so the question I have to face and each one of us has to face is what have I done with the time with the health the money the education the upbringing the privileges what have I done with the life that God has given me I may be respectable but how many privileges have I squandered how often have I just done nothing when a word or a deed was required I think when we look at ourselves in those lights that should humble us Jesus speaks of a time of changes when the proud will be humbled or shamed and the humble will be honored there may be many occasions in this life when that happens but there's an ultimate time of change at the judgment on the last day and if we remain proud of our lives of our deeds we will be put to eternal shame on the last day God will be God will be exalted for our forgiveness for sins Jesus Christ and if we believe in this sacrifice if we are humble and if we repent of our sins then we will be exalted by God sometimes in this life God honors those who humbly seek him but at the resurrection and judgment God will honor those who humbly trust him they will rise again to everlasting life and honor so which of these two represents you let's pray Lord we thank you for this very short story parable that you told and yet which is so deep so profound and so searching and we pray that you would give us the grace to live humbly before you that we would be those who as your word says that we would be we would live according to what you require that we would act justly that we would love mercy and that we would walk humbly with you our God so grant us grace to do that we pray in Jesus name Amen Amen God He raised in he who and He saved every Mary sovereignavian ... [38 : 32] Virgin ver k Let them keep