

The Gospel Removes Self-Reliance

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Preacher: Pastor Andrew

[0:00] Well, y'all just sang a mighty song full of truth.! Let me just remind you of a verse of the song we just sang.

! It says this, No fate I dread, I know I am forgiven. The future sure, the price it has been paid. For Jesus bled and suffered for my pardon, and he was raised to overthrow the grave.

To this I hold. My sin has been defeated. Jesus now and ever is my plea. Oh, the chains are released, I can sing.

I am free, yet not I, but through Christ in me. What does that truth do for those of us who have embraced that truth and placed our faith in Christ and enjoy the benefits of salvation?

What would you expect the life of those who have been truly saved to look like? Those who have experienced God's answer to the biggest problems of life, the biggest problem of life, I should say, and that is our sin that leads to death and condemnation, separation from God, and through Jesus who took our sin on himself, on the cross, made a way for us to enjoy life with God through salvation and forgiveness of Christ.

[1:34] What should all of that do for us in this life as we come to terms with that reality? If Jesus has taken care of the biggest problem of life, what would we expect him to do with the lesser things?

And if he has done that for us, what would you expect the life of believers to look like? Wouldn't you expect it to look like a life of confidence, a life of peace, a life of joy, a life of rest, a life of dependence on God and not self-reliance?

This morning, Jesus is going to confront us in that very space. He's going to confront that very thing in us that, by the way, is natural to all of us.

It is this mantra that we hear in our culture, in our society, trust yourself, do it yourself, make it happen, you can pull this off.

And it shows up in the little things, it shows up in the big things, and so, you know, I wonder, if you're honest with yourself, like me, how many of us wake up breathless?

[2:58] We anticipate the things that are going to happen in the day, or maybe we collapse into bed at night and we are just exhausted and we wake up, we're still exhausted because as we anticipate what's coming, we know we have to pull this off another day.

At least that's what we're taught. There is built in to the rhythms of life this sense that we need to make it happen.

Even this morning, I took my shower, I was standing there at the mirror and this deep sigh that I gave and my wife says, how you doing?

I'm like, you know, this morning, I'm supposed to be preaching on how the gospel destroys and removes self-reliance and here I am, I'm feeling the weight of having to carry this on my own.

And so, your pastor needs this text as much as anybody in this room because this is what we've been taught. This is what we've been told to do.

[4:06] It's built in to the philosophers of this world. It's inescapable. Like, for example, the slogan, just do it. That's our philosopher. Nike.

Or, how about even our even our hardware stores that are that are that are named do it best? Or, how about Home Depot which is doers get more done?

Or, Lowe's that says never stop improving? Or, Burger King that says have it your way. This is what we've been fed.

This is how we are supposed to live. And this is the pressure that we feel we have to carry. It's built in. It seeps in to every part of life wherever you go.

This idea that you have to pull it off another day. Ralph Waldo Emerson in his book all the way back in the 1800s and his philosophy is carried on into today.

[5:12] His book called Self-Reliance. And in this book he says trust yourself. He also says insist on yourself. Never imitate.

Or his contemporary Henry David Thoreau which he says go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined. Or even Nietzsche the German philosopher in the 1800s says no one can build you the bridge on which you and only you must cross the river of life.

If you want to live this life it depends on you. You've got to make it happen. And this has been this has been the history of the world since the very beginning.

You can be like God's. You can make it happen. You can be just like God. Just eat that fruit. It can make you just like him.

You can pull it off. You don't need God anyway. These self-help books according to a study the self-help industry has exploded in recent years so that from 2013 to 2019 it grew by 11%.

[6:31] And then in just one year from 2020 to 2021 it grew 20%. This self-help book this self-help era that we're living in.

The do-it-yourself culture that permeates every part of life and that's exactly what Jesus is confronting in our passage today. This idea that we can do it ourself.

You can pull it off. You can make it happen. So I'd encourage you if you would please turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 18. Luke chapter 18 we're going to be starting in verse 9 we're moving our way to verse 17.

If you're using the Pew Bible in front of you it's on page I think 877 Luke chapter 18 Here we're going to find through through this passage especially the first group of verses that Jesus is going to confront a heart of self-reliance.

Jesus confronts a heart of self-reliance. And so my guess is that everybody in this room this is a message for you. It's a message for you.

[7:40] Look with me in verse 9 I'm going to read through verse 14 as we jump into our study today. It said he also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

Two men went up into the temple to pray one a Pharisee 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 that this man went down to his house justified rather than the other for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted right at the very beginning of this parable this section of scripture Jesus is helping to address a particular issue that Luke brings out into the forefront for us so there's no mystery as to why Jesus is providing this parable he says right there at the beginning he told this parable to some who trusted in themselves

Jesus is going to confront this heart of self reliance and he's going to begin with a Pharisee the self reliant Pharisee is who stands out at the very beginning of our view he told this parable to those who trusted in themselves the NIV puts it this way to some who were confident of their own righteousness maybe that's a better rendition a better translation because the word trusted here is not the word pistuo which is the word for faith that we find throughout the New Testament but it's the word patho which is the word persuade to be persuaded or to be convinced the reality that's occurred in the past that has continuing effects of persuading them of stirring up within them this confidence that they've arrived they're persuaded by their own righteousness and of course the Pharisees as we've been looking at the Pharisees throughout the past several chapters and throughout this year we've come to see time and time again that they were the model keepers of righteousness in their minds they felt like they embodied all the standard that God had set and so they commended that kind of lifestyle to those who lived in first century Israel if you want to be a kingdom goer if you want to enter into the kingdom your life needs to look like ours we are the standard we are the ones who set the precedent as it were and so here is this Pharisee who believes that he's arrived and so

Jesus is going to address this group of individuals who feel convinced of their own self-reliance the problem of course is that this Pharisee was comparing himself with others rather than understanding and appreciating the standard that had been set from the scripture he is looking around he's evaluating himself based upon others that he sees and he spotted somebody in the temple he knows he's better than and so he begins to compare himself with him of course from an external point of view he was head and shoulders above this tax collector and that's why Jesus uses this Pharisee and this tax collector as examples in his parable to help direct attention to what true dependence on God true faith in God will look like so he uses this Pharisee who because of his own self-reliance it turns his heart not only against God as it were but especially reflected in how he sees others notice he trusted in himself at the end of verse 9 that they were righteous and he treated others with contempt this is perhaps the first clue that something was gravely out of step in his life he treated others with contempt this word for contempt is to despise to look down on to ridicule it's to treat somebody as if they had no account to consider them as worthless individuals this is the same word that was used to describe the mocking treatment that Jesus received on the cross at the hands of the soldiers that kind of ridicule that kind of mocking the faulty comparison produced in their own heart an inflated view of themselves and a diminished view of everyone else around them and by the way also a diminished view of God himself bringing

God down and that's what Jesus is addressing here that's what Jesus is confronting Jesus begins with this Pharisee to help draw attention to what true faith in God really looks like he says in verse 10 two men went up into the temple to pray one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector the very nature of the fact that in physicality they needed to go up to the temple in a physical way was an illustration or a demonstration as it were of their position before God and that should have been enough and of course in going to the temple nothing that happened in the temple was something that they could take credit for the temple itself that had been given to them by God the priests who were the agents of God to usher them into God's presence the sacrifices and the altar that was there making atonement a demonstration a visible representation of that atonement that was going to take place for them through

[13:50] Jesus none of which they could take credit for and so that should have been enough for this self-reliant Pharisee to know that he needs to turn his heart towards God but it didn't accomplish that purpose this Pharisee was completely oblivious to the provisions that were outside of himself so Jesus now describes his posture notice that in verse 11 the Pharisee standing by himself prayed here he is standing by himself here he is separated from others here he is getting maximum exposure perhaps standing as close to the sanctuary as he could he's standing in a place so that everyone could see he's speaking out loud so that everyone can hear and notice how he's praying the Pharisee in the ESV says he's standing by himself but we find in other versions the translation is they trusted in themselves or that they were praying about themselves this

Pharisee wasn't praying to God at all this Pharisee was dependent upon his own self righteousness here he is standing by himself praying out loud this was their practice so we find throughout the duration of Christ's ministry Matthew chapter 6 verse 5 and when you pray you must not be like the hypocrites for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners that they may be seen by others truly I say to you they have received their reward and then it's prayer notice in the middle of verse 11 he 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 one could argue that this man wasn't even praying at all he was just drawing attention to his own self righteousness he was applauding himself before others there is no reflection of his heart that demonstrates any reverence or devotion to God at all just a devotion to himself he prays this self congratulatory prayer calling attention to his own distinct life he's not a robber he's not an evildoer he's not an adulterer so he's listing off several of the commands that we find throughout the mosaic law he's been a law keeper he hasn't done those things and now he directs attention not only to things he's not but now the things that he's doing which are above and beyond what was expected in the law he fasts twice a week fasting was only expected from the people of Israel once a year but they in their religiosity are fasting twice a week which would have happened on

Monday and Thursday and here they are tithing all that they get not just of the income that they receive but everything that they receive they are tithing to the Lord externally he has it all together he has every reason to be confident in his own spirituality he has cause to rejoice and from an external perspective one could argue that he doesn't even need God at all he's arrived himself but of course all of this is self serving it demonstrates his self reliance it shows his dependence and confidence in his own merit and now Jesus provides a contrast to the Pharisee in verses 13 and 14 we see now the dependence or the dependent tax collector no longer the self righteousness that's reflected in the Pharisee but now this dependence that's reflected in this tax collector notice 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 of course the tax collector represents all that is anti-Pharisee all that is anti-righteousness he knew himself that he did not measure up to God's standard he's in this temple and he comes to terms with who he is in relation to God and he directs his attention to two parts first the character of God and then the nature of himself he comes to know that that God is truly righteous and it's reflected in his posture it's reflected in the way that he approaches God notice how he comes and postures himself before the Lord he's standing but not as one who is setting himself apart drawing attention to himself but over to the side he's standing in reverence he's standing as one who seeks to honor God himself standing in the corner he's not interested in drawing attention to himself but he's there to worship

God and to plead for God's mercy on his life he is humble not willing to even lift his eyes to heaven he's come to terms with his sin he's beating his breast which is an expression of sorrow and great pain over the sin that he has that he has sinned against the Lord and then his prayer the tone of his request of course is different than that of the Pharisee there is no self focus this is a prayer of penitence a prayer for mercy a prayer of repentance it's simple it's desperate just a few words in the Greek God be merciful to me a sinner he comes to terms with who God is in his character a God who is full of mercy this word for mercy in the Greek isn't the normal word for mercy but it's actually the word propitiation which is the word that means to appease to satisfy it's a word that speaks of forgiveness or to make atonement for to be a sacrifice and here whether this was during the time of morning sacrifice or the time of evening sacrifice all of the reminders of what

[20 : 32] God has done through sacrifice in making a way for him to approach God himself he has come to terms with the fact that he can only approach God if and only if there's an atonement for sin and of course Christ is the ultimate and complete atonement for sin he's come to plead for mercy because he knows that God delights in mercy God delights in mercy and so this could be better translated God make atonement for me a sinner salvation and forgiveness he understands are outside of him they're offered to him through Christ and through Christ alone second he acknowledges himself as a sinner not only understands that atonement only comes through God but that he himself is unworthy and not just a sinner but in the Greek it uses the definite article the sinner the ultimate sinner the chief of sinners you might say the representation of all that one might think of when they think about the sinner here he is so perhaps even willing to receive and admit that all that the

Pharisee had said about him was true but there he is pleading for the mercy of God forgiveness of God that comes through those who ask and then Jesus' commentary in verse 14 notice I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted this phrase he went down to his house justified is an expression that points to the fact that he was made right declared righteous it's not that he went into the temple a sinner and out of the temple not a sinner no he was a sinner both ways but he went into the temple condemned he came out of the temple justified exonerated the condemnation lifted from him because of the forgiveness that comes through Christ and his sacrifice of course not because of his own actions not because he wasn't a sinner in the most vile of sinners he was the sinner in his very words but yet he still came out of the temple justified forgiven atoned for the tax collector's prayer was accepted

God found favor in this humble prayer in the understanding and recognition of dependence on God and on God alone for forgiveness as we now apply this to ourselves we ask ourselves this question what is the test of your self reliance what is the test of whether or not you fit into this category of personal self reliance and what would you expect to see of those who are learning to trust in God because we understand from the apostle Paul that the just will live by faith the righteous will live by faith in God how does that show up day to day how do you demonstrate how do I demonstrate my faith in God how do I how do I represent or commit myself moment by moment day by day to place myself into the hands of the

Lord and to express my dependence on him just as if I was depending on him like the oxygen that fills my lungs every time I take a breath of course there are very simple ways for us to express this things that you have heard from the time that you are a believer things like Psalm 40 verse 8 where the psalmist says I delight to do your will oh my God your law is within my heart are we those who pursue the word of God every moment every day are we those who demonstrate our dependence on God so that God is first he gets our first fruits and maybe your first fruits are in the morning or maybe your first fruits are in the evening depending upon how God wired you but you're giving God the best free of destruction just you and him just like

Jesus does can you even begin to get your head around this Jesus as God demonstrated his confidence in the father and not self reliance by moving out into the desolate places and communing with God one on one demonstrating his dependence on the father he was God and so if Jesus reflected and demonstrated his dependence on the father this way how much more should those of us who call God our father demonstrate a commitment to God through devotion and love for the word of God itself and I love how the apostle Paul puts this in Philippians chapter three verses seven and eight and verse ten he says whatever gain I had I counted as loss for the sake of Christ indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing

[26 : 21] Christ Jesus my Lord for his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order to gain Christ that I might know him in the power of his resurrection and may share in his sufferings becoming like him in his death what is the one pursuit of your life what is the ultimate goal for living what is the thing that you are living for maybe I should put it that way and what you're living for will show up from day to day and the things that you get stressed about or the things that occupy your attention and your time and your focus and the things you're willing to get rid of for the sake of having that one thing that is all important and the apostle Paul whatever it takes whatever you take away from me

God as long as I have you it's not only enough but it is good and so I wonder this morning how many of us myself included how many of us need to pray this prayer God do whatever it takes to strip me of my self reliance and make me dependent on you so that you are first so that you are foremost so that you are everything so that you are the good of my life and I find satisfaction in you that I might know him in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings whatever it takes Lord I want to know!

you! Jesus says this in John 15 verse 16 you did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide so that whatever you ask the father in my name he may give it to you now there's a lot going on in this verse but not only the fact that God has drawn us into relationship with him but he's drawn us into to bear fruit and what that means is as the Holy Spirit is working in our life he's producing spiritual fruit and when that spiritual fruit takes place and when we are working in a way that pleases God it places us in a situation of dependence where the only way that's going to work out is if

God is the one working it through so it leads us to dependence in prayer that God has appointed us he's called us with the express purpose of making us dependent in him through prayer does your life reflect a dependence on God through prayer so that every major decision every family issue everything that's going on at work every conversation that you have with others is so punctuated is so carried is so supported by prayer that God is in it and through it and you see that God is working so that his fullness is bearing itself out in your life as you are submitting yourself to him in confidence rather than self reliance so

Jesus confronts this self reliance and now in this next couple of groups of verses he commands the heart of dependence we have the correlation as well in verses 15 to 17 notice it says now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them and when the disciples saw it they rebuked him but Jesus called them to him saying let the children come to me and do not hinder them for such belongs the kingdom of God truly I say to you whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it so Jesus is commanding this heart of dependence and we see it in the example of these children and not only the humility of these children but especially the dependence of these children because as it really to be honest these kids don't show any true spiritual nature at all they are spiritually bankrupt they're unable to do anything meritorious and that's the point of the story is they're not even coming to

[31 : 28] Jesus on their own they have to be brought by their parents Jesus uses this word infants which is the same word we find in Luke! chapter 1 verse 41 and 45 I think it is which speaks of John the Baptist in the womb of Elizabeth that's the kind of people we're talking about and Jesus is commanding kids you can't come in to the kingdom unless you're a helpless little baby unless you come to a place of understanding it is not of you it is only of God you add nothing to the equation it is based on Christ's death and resurrection and righteousness and atonement and him alone and unless God strips you and strips me of our self reliance we will never come to a place of enjoying all the benefits of the relationship that God has to offer through his son

Jesus Christ will keep depending on ourselves and will keep falling flat on our face the significance of this account that we find here in Luke chapter 18 is significant because now we're beginning to merge our stories now we find also in Matthew and also in Mark's account now these stories are beginning to converge where we've kind of gone from Luke chapter 9 to this point Luke has been tracking the ministry of Jesus outside of Galilee and now we're finding some convergence and we're going to begin to see how these narratives blend together again but this is significant that is repeated in all three synoptic gospels to help draw attention to the significance of faith and dependence on God being released from self reliance we find in this story that Jesus rebukes his disciples because

Jesus wants his disciples to understand that they are acting just like the Pharisees they are looking at contempt! on these little babies feeling as though these babies are not worth Jesus time so in a sense they're doing exactly what the Pharisee did in the temple looking with contempt on that tax collector and Jesus says wait a minute I want you to understand that these are the very examples of faith that I want to put forward to you you can't come into the kingdom unless you're just like them just as dependent come as a child come with a heart of dependence contributing nothing and gaining everything in Christ just as we find in Titus chapter 3 verse 5 it says he saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness but according to his own mercy by the washing of regeneration!

and the renewal of the Holy Spirit the mercy of God is there to meet you God delights in mercy he loves to show his mercy it's part of who he is he wants to show it off and make it known in Micah chapter 7 verse 18 who is a God like you who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance you do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy so access mercy let God show off his merciful benevolent character to you plead for mercy so the heart of our Savior is put on display as he is commanding dependence as he loves to show mercy but as we also see in the life of Christ his love for serving the least of these

Jesus was not like the Pharisee and looking with contempt on those who were so much smaller than him so much lower than him but he delighted in showing mercy and extending kindness in ministry and service even to these babies who had nothing to contribute to him so I end our time together just with this final word this brief word I want to commend to you the ministry of our Savior and recognize your opportunity to serve the same way you have an opportunity to serve that's what I want to just share briefly here I don't want to miss this opportunity to commend to you the significance of ministry to children not only ministry to kids within your families but also the ministry that we can have as a church body in helping to address this significant aspect of what we're called to as a church you know you may not be called to full-time ministry you may not have the gift of teaching you may not feel particularly gifted in communicating but I can tell you if you have children or are hoping to have children

[37:02] God has called you to children's ministry in your home and outside of your home let me just share some statistics these statistics by the way of course are not authoritative but I think they bring the point home okay modern research indicates that what a person believes is locked in by the age of 13 what you believe at age 13 is pretty much what you're going to believe when you die apparently 32% of those between 5 and 13 have 32% probability of accepting Christ as their savior then it moves to 4% between those who are 14 and 18 and then after 18 until you die only 6% of adults after 18 become Christian another way to look at this is 94% of people who live in America 94% of them are going to make a decision for Christ before they're 18

Barna research has also discovered that a person's lifelong behavior and views are generally developed when they are young and there are four categories first a person's moral foundations are generally in place by the time they're age nine second a person's response to the meaning of personal value of Jesus Christ his life his death his resurrection is usually determined before a person reaches 18 third Barna showed data indicating that the most cases of people's spiritual beliefs are irrecoverable excuse me irrecoverably formed when they are preteen those beliefs include the nature of God the existence of Satan the reliability of the Bible perceptions regarding the afterlife the holiness of Jesus Christ and the means of gaining God's favor finally research revealed that adult church leaders usually have some serious involvement in church life and training when they are young four out of five pastors and church leaders have been involved in some way in children's ministry have grown up in the church okay again this is not authoritative but let me just bring it all together what this means is four out of five of your future pastors and Christian leaders are currently in children's ministry and 94% of those who will make a decision for Christ are in children's ministry and youth ministry right now if you want to make a difference if you want to have an impact can I encourage you to get plugged in to children's ministry not only is this a way for you to pour into and invest in the lives of others but let me tell you the benefits are more than you can even imagine because especially as young families young parents you're not only able to invest in others and maybe even your own kids but you're able to build relationships with people who have gone down the road before you and many of them who are helping to oversee children's ministry right now have been raising families and investing in youngsters for the last 20 years and so this is not only a discipling opportunity for you to invest in others but a discipling opportunity for them to invest in you to grow to be the kind of parent that is learning from others okay are we going to show the heart of

Christ in loving the least of these are we going to demonstrate in a very tangible way a dependence on God and not a personal reliance may God help us this week to press him and to demonstrate that God is everything for us that we are confident in him that we are running to him and cultivating that relationship that demonstrates a dependence a reliance and a commitment on Christ and Christ alone may God help us oh Lord I thank you for this word thank you for this parable for what it teaches us thank you Lord for the challenge but also the encouragement that you have accomplished everything for us so we can be dependent on you we don't need to rely on ourselves for anything may you be pleased with our lives and may you accomplish your work in and through us we pray in Jesus name amen