

Tax Collectors and Pharisees

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[0 : 00] Let's just begin by bowing our heads and say a word of prayer. Almighty and everlasting God, who hastest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent, create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Amen. The call is for Ash Wednesday, of course. You have a paper in front of you with these words on it.

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others. Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee 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.

[1 : 55] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

I'm sure those words are well known to you. That's Luke. Luke 18. A parable of Jesus. So today, we are obviously just going to look at this parable told by Jesus from Luke's Gospel, obviously about prayer.

Or more specifically, approach to prayer. Or perhaps it's the condition of godly prayer. So we'll just have a look at this parable.

It will be accomplished by what we've just done together, by reading. Reading, as you know, was once a straightforward activity.

Words before us, they enter the mind. I hope that's just what's happened now. And out comes their author's meaning. Then we, the reader or readers, we agree, we disagree, we affirm what we've read, we deny it, we want to qualify it.

[3 : 17] We do a lot of things when we read. But there it is, reading. But that was then and this is now. Reading has been, again, as you know, reading has been examined, formally and informally, in the last generation or two, by linguists, and longer than that, I'm sure, by linguists, by philosophers, by literary theorists and others, becoming thereby reading a very involved matter.

It happens when these guys get a hold of something simple. Alas for mere reading. But this may be for, I hope we'll see a bit of this today as we go through this parable.

This may be for the good. Things are, as you've noticed, a long life's way. Things are not always what they seem. After all, our parable is about something obvious and perhaps easily accepted, not being what it seems to be.

It's a warning, perhaps, that we must not read too easily or too blibly. So let's try and read closely and responsibly as believers today in front of God's Word.

We read, of course, what Luke wrote there. Luke preserves what Jesus taught in a measure of what might be called the narrative setting of this teaching.

[4 : 45] As you go through Luke, you'll notice that. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and he teaches his disciples. In both this passage stands alone and it resides within other things remembered by Luke.

Luke, this implies very strongly. It's one of the things that comes out in reader response study and issues of authors and readers, what they do.

This simple fact that we have something written by Luke as taught by Jesus in some kind of narrative setting. This implies, I would think quite strongly, that a reader will think that this project of preservation is worthwhile.

It's sort of implicit there. We're attending to what Luke wrote. So we think it's worthwhile, his project of remembering what Jesus taught. The reader is presumably interested in prayer.

I hope all of us here certainly are. And is therefore assumed to be in some measure engaged with this material. Just think, we just read something, but we've already, according to some theorists, implied a bunch of things, a number of things.

[6 : 04] We're interested in this subject matter. We think that what Luke did in preserving the teachings of Jesus was worthwhile. We're in some way engaged with this material. Well, are we?

This, of course, challenges the reader as mere passive recipient. Not just casually reading something here. Reading is not unencumbered by the reader's presence.

Is not a reader a kind of hijacker? We might be these things today as we read Luke, remembering Jesus, teaching a parable of prayer. Perhaps we as readers are kind of like hijackers.

We will aggressively appropriate these words in our own terms, on our own terms. Let's take over these words and make them mean what we want them to mean.

This goes on in the church all the time. Out of Luke's narrative we'll take it and just put it into our own narrative, where it will mean what we want it to mean. Is that a necessary thing when we read?

[7 : 10] Is that good? Is that bad? Is that indifferent? What about that kind of thing? The strong thesis here, this is what a lot of people would have heard about even if they don't attend to these kind of theorists who talk about reading and authors.

The strong thesis states and has stated that authors are really an illusion. At most they write for themselves really. And we as readers, we really rewrite their words for ourselves.

You know, again this agenda of complicating the reading phenomenon. After all, we see in our, famously in this parable, we hear right about the middle at verse 11 there, the Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself.

The implied other that he's talking to is questioned by Luke, the way he remembers that moment. The Pharisee prayed thus with himself.

And we all, according to some, read or write if we're authors likewise. We do this with ourselves. The implied other, the author, has simply disappeared or is questioned.

[8 : 28] We are alone, in a sense, with our meaning, the meaning that we decide our reading experience has. The kind of footnote to this, before we continue, it's odd that strong views about authors like that, views which cause readers to, in a sense, they're always deferring meaning.

There's no real meaning here because the author can't possibly have meant something. The author, again, just fades away like a mist. These ideas are put before us by authors.

And they expect readers to get what they say. So they're kind of in, that's a bit of a trouble for this way of reading, reading. You know, I enjoyed your treatise on reading, Professor, but it helps me when I bake pies.

It might disappoint them. You know, I'm supposed to get what they intend when they write. They write, they intend, and we as readers deserve. But at their best, these theorists, famously, as you know, they suspect, they're suspicious of power, the kind of power implied by an author's presence with us, in their words.

Authors have an implied authority. And they want to, these theorists, challenge that authority. Maybe that's a good thing. As in our parable, after all, in our parable, one fold this as we go, in our parable, authority, real authority is noted by the teller of this parable.

[10:04] The authority is challenged, or at least it's doubted, and even more. So again, we want to read humbly.

We want to be teachable. But at the same time, we want to be responsible and open to change, from these words, open to challenge. We don't want to be mere passive readers, giving too much authority to some author.

Or we want that author to show us something that maybe creates in us a sense of authority. The parable, on its surface, is meant actually to discomfort.

This might come through as we unfold it. To cause a thinking again, about prayer. He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves.

They were righteous. They despised others. Two men went up into the temple to pray. One a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

[11:16] I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. 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 rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled. He who humbles himself will be exalted.

A parable of Jesus remembered by Luke. And we are readers. When you read these gospel passages, do you get a sense of Jesus coming through?

Have you ever thought about that as a gospel reader? I know in this room we're gospel readers. This is subjective, of course, but I believe it's there. A sense of who this teacher was, what he was like.

Short, often, his teaching, accessible, memorable, and yet you sense weightiness in it. They invite, this teaching, it invites and rewards prolonged pondering.

[12:29] I hope we all do that. We prolong our pondering over what the Lord, the man from heaven, teaches. It is very accessible, but it does not mean, accessible does not mean trivial.

It invites and rewards prolonged pondering. Two people, two men, went up into the temple to pray, verse 10.

Two people go into the temple, and there they prayed. So this story begins. The temple was a place of prayer, wasn't it?

Jesus hated the abuse of this place. He once grabbed a rope of some kind, and in a fury, chased some people out of the temple, or some place, some part of the temple.

He hated the abuse of the temple. A place could be very important to Jesus. A place, bricks and mortar. It's a really important place. I hope St. John's is a really important place where the gospel is preached.

[13 : 40] It's not just bricks and mortar. Jesus hated the abuse of the temple. So the Pharisee and the tax collector are doing wisely in going to the temple to pray.

They both get kudos right off the bat, I think. They go to the temple to pray. That's what it's for. Here is a kind of initial obedience on behalf of being acted out by both these people, the Pharisee and the tax collector.

They go to the temple to pray. That's good. The temple is now, we all know, one wall, isn't it? A wailing wall, still on the world stage, even as a ruin.

It still resonates in the world, doesn't it, this place. As words resonate or echo or teach or give texture, reading is so important.

Paul told the Corinthian Gentiles, of all people, that they were the temple. An astonishing statement from a Jew to a bunch of Gentiles.

[14 : 47] Very weird Gentiles, as you know if you're a reader of Corinthians. In the revealed theological mystery, which is scripture, which we read, the temple moves about, doesn't it?

It is a storied place through scripture. It is a scene of conflict and a very real, concrete, spiritual metaphor, the temple.

The parable space, if you will, is the temple. It begins, for me, it begins to draw me in. Jesus tells us a real, important meaning here.

He draws us in. Something important is going on in the place of prayer. Perhaps we are the temple where this transgresses.

Maybe that's what the Apostle Paul would say to us today. You are the temple where this prayer drama occurs. Maybe it's occurring in your life today.

[15 : 50] Two people go into the temple. One, a Pharisee. Talk about words resonating and acquiring this.

I made this word up the other day. Resonation. Is there such a word? Talk about how words resonate. C.S. Lewis. I'm going to quote him today a few times.

He said, helpfully, I would think, that we must not become Pharisaical in our attitude to the Pharisees. Which is true enough, I think.

True enough. The Pharisee, of course, is now synonymous with hypocrisy. And we throw in pride. Just why not? Hypocrisy and pride.

Pride, Lewis again, is the complete anti-God state of mind. The man portrayed here, of course, we can safely say a few things about such a man.

[16 : 52] He thought that he knew God. In fear and trembling, I'll say he may have written a book all about knowing God. A subject we're not going into today.

More. More. He thought he knew what God wanted. By his own words, we learn that he fasted twice a week. Apparently, the learned tell us this.

It was Tuesdays and Thursdays. It's basically what some scholars can know. Tuesdays and Thursdays was the day. That must come from a later rabbinic source and they project it back into the time of our Lord.

It probably was Tuesdays and Thursdays. Fasting concentrates attention. He wanted to know God and obeyed, apparently, the ways, the revealed ways of knowing God.

When you fast, Jesus said to his disciples, Matthew 6. Common this was for the pious ones in Israel. They fasted. Our Lord fasted.

[17 : 57] This Pharisee fasted. I doubt if the tax collector fasted. It was to be kept a secret. Our Lord made a big point of this, didn't he?

Kept a secret between one and God. God wants to be sought out. Knowing him can be a strange kind of work at times. The Pharisee did this work.

He also tithed, famously, we're told here, aren't we? He tithed. He was thorough, apparently. He was meticulous in disobedience. In the resources which came his way, he was obedient.

Apparently, some of these chaps tithed little things, famously, didn't they? Like mint and other things. He desired godliness in this part of his life.

Just noting the obvious here. This Pharisee fellow. He also had this man a clear sense of separation from moral declension.

[18 : 56] I am not like other people, he says. I'm not like this tax collector, certainly. I am not like, in about the middle of verse 11, God, I thank thee that I am not like other men.

I am not like this tax collector. Come out from among them and be separate. A great word from Holy Scripture. Come out from among them and be separate.

Might have been often on his lips. Therefore, he stayed separate, keeping distance. He thought this was necessary, apparently, this Pharisee.

Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. So he obeyed. These were, of course, famously, Israel's teachers.

Honored their work was. Or at least they honored the law. And they were protectors of the law in Israel.

[20 : 06] They were Israel's teachers. They knew the law. Knew the story of Israel. Wanted again to protect it. They were charged with keeping it. And they were charged with keeping its purity.

They were a kind of spiritual elite. Jesus, we know from the Gospels, very much honored their work. Or at least he honored their office. They had, to use the words of Jesus, they had inherited the seat of Moses.

And their teaching was to be obeyed. See Matthew 23 on that point. They've inherited the seat of Moses. Their teaching is to be obeyed. So Jesus taught his disciples.

Jesus of Nazareth. How should we read this man? We realize he can be sometimes very complex. Can't he, our Lord? Was he this one who teaches this parable to us this morning by a loop?

Was he of a conservative sensibility? A kind of habitual honorer of institutions? A kind of Burke kind of guy, you know?

[21 : 11] Or was he a radical? A sensibility which would always encourage change. Always very much open to change. Perhaps very radical change.

Perhaps all of the above. Or none of the above. Perhaps he challenges all categories. Jesus can be hard to capture in a net of words.

What was he really like? Peasant shrewdness. Always like this one last time from Lewis. Peasant shrewdness and aristocratic honor was how Lewis read the personality of Jesus.

As a literary scholar. Just immersed in these words. One of peasant shrewdness and aristocratic honor. That's how again he read the Gospels.

Let me just belabor that for a moment if I may. So as one possessing, as I read Lewis here about our Lord, as portrayed in the Gospels. So as one possessing aristocratic honor, Jesus would honor an ancient teaching office.

[22 : 21] Therefore he taught his disciples. They've inherited the seed of Moses, the Pharisees. Therefore obey what they teach. Jesus would honor that office. But in his peasant shrewdness, he would see through occupants of said office.

Just continue to read in that chapter in Matthew. You'll see how he saw through them. Did he ever. So he honors their office, but he could be very critical of them. What was our Lord?

Was he a conservative fellow? A radical fellow? What was he? One obedience of the Christian is to just saturate the mind in the Gospels and all of Scripture.

The divine word received in divine reading. Reading is important to Christians, has been thought about by Christians very much.

The medievals, people of the Middle Ages, got a lot of this just right as they thought about divine reading. And as we do that, perhaps it will answer such questions about what kind of person are we dealing with as we read the Gospels.

[23 : 32] And it will certainly address issues much more profound than that, of course, I'm sure. Reading is a Gospel good. I hope we've all discovered that in our lives.

So enough of the Pharisees. I'm getting bored of hearing about them, I'm sure. We hear about them in church all the time, the Pharisees. Usually pretty bad things about them. Sometimes I wonder if it's unbalanced, the way we present the Pharisees.

I don't know. In Luke's Gospel, there's a moment, has it come up in our walk through Luke so far and our preaching? Remember, it was Pharisees who came to Jesus and said, Herod's looking for you.

Get away from here. They could be friendly to Jesus. They were on the same team, they thought. We're in Israel, protecting Israel, showing Israel the way.

But there it is, the Pharisees. It's tax time. We should briefly look at these fellows. Hope you've done your income tax. The NDB, I just note in passing, the New English Bible calls them tax gatherers.

[24 : 32] Which I think sounds better somehow. They gathered it. They scooped it up out of the people's lives. And it's brief, this look at these tax gatherers, because, again, it's quite well known, doesn't it?

We have a generally pretty good understanding of who these guys were. These people collected Roman Gentile taxes. And what they gathered above that, probably a set amount by their tax masters, what they gathered above that, probably by deception or threat or extortion, whatever method they used, all of that was theirs.

These guys didn't have many friends, probably. The charge hurled at Jesus in the Gospel, as you'll recall, the charge leveled at him, that he was a friend of sinners and tax collectors, is not to mean, as I understand it, too liberal or tolerant around bad people, merely.

It is more like a charge, a much more serious charge. It is more like the charge of courting friendship with what we would call proverbially quizlings.

People who had sold out to the Romans. And Jesus taught that you should love your enemies. And he was seen to be a friend of such people. Therefore, he seemed to be letting Israel down horribly by being a friend of such people.

[26 : 11] He was a bit of a, we might call them a quizling, or too friendly with such people. These people were in league with oppressors. And Jesus, if he was a good Jew, should keep his distance from such people.

As this Pharisee kept distance from a tax collector, someone who had sold out to the Romans and oppressed his own people. And good Jews thought they should, at least if they were Pharisees, usually, apparently, thought they should keep a distance from such people.

Jesus didn't. Love, love them. Love your enemies. He's a friend of tax collectors and sinners. You know. On this reading again, a parable like this in front of us would be heard as quite aggressive, perhaps.

A bit edgy. Perhaps giving great offense to pious Jews. You're speaking well of those people. You might have relatives who were destroyed by these people.

This was no game. They could destroy people's lives. Jesus says, apparently, nice things about them. One of them in this parable.

[27 : 30] It could give great offense, this parable. Luke's introduction. Did you notice Luke's introduction? He's got an irritating habit. I say that piously. I love Luke.

Luke can sometimes tell you what a parable means. He also told this parable to some, to some, who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.

On this reading, Luke's introduction might even be an attempt to soften the parable. Don't look down on other people.

And perhaps Luke has here an agenda of, and forget the aggressive way the point was made. On this reading again, Luke's introduction is for a readership, perhaps living outside of the social dynamic of Pharisee and tax collector.

And wants to tell us that we need to do a loving and gentle reading, which will be a true reading.

[28 : 34] The parable does not teach despising Pharisees, and does not teach that we should despise tax collectors, but learning something else. Which is mainly what Luke, why Luke gives that kind of slightly soft introduction to it.

Two people, two prayers. One prayer rehearses obedience. Obviously, doesn't it? The other prayer, famously, asserts nothing except the status of a sinner.

God be merciful to me, a sinner. God be merciful to me, a sinner. That's his prayer, the tax collector. Where does that kind of prayer, that second prayer go to, go in its meaning?

How does it unfold? Well, I'll say something like this in the interest of time. It really, I read it as, in the discussion time, you can tell me, you're reading of it.

The tax collector is saying, the tax gatherer, God, act. God, be merciful. I am a sinner.

[29 : 51] Now here is the more unfolding, if I've got it right. It means, teach me, in this searing admission, that I'm a sinner.

In this searing admission, let me learn to hate my sin, as you hate my sin. I am a sinner.

I am wrong in your presence. And I must become the kind of person who knows that thoroughly. I come to hate my sin, the way you hate my sin. How the tax collector lived, was hateful, and destructive, and ungodly, and vicious.

There's nothing cute about a tax gatherer in the first century. In such prayer, there is an implied spiritual and moral commitment to change, isn't there?

Later in Luke, you'll recall, Luke 19, just a chapter on, Luke presents us with a chap, famously named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector.

[31 : 02] He was really good at it. He moved up in the hierarchy. He repents, and invites Jesus to dinner, and he announces that his whole life is changing now.

Ah, yes. You can't go on being a tax collector when you've repented. You've come to hate what you've been doing. Just another aside, our faith is seen by some in the church and outside the church as a faith which is bad at justice.

This point has often been made. Love triumphs over justice as a kind of Christian theme, but it often comes at the mere expense of justice, doesn't it?

And this should not be. You'll agree, Christians have to work at that. Our love is not a cheap love which merely sets aside justice. It is often noted, as we continue to look at this parable, it is often noted that the Pharisee prayed thus with himself.

We're exactly, just into verse 11, isn't it? The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself. Apparently, not all early manuscripts have this little word present.

[32 : 19] So I want to speculate. let's speculate. Maybe it was not in the original teaching. I'll tell you that the New English Bible does not include that little phrase in this part of Luke.

So maybe it wasn't in the original teaching, but was in, I like to think this, but was in the original reading and hearing about the parable, hearing the parable.

If that little bit of speculation is true, that means something. The implied reader is not distant as he, she reads, interacts with this parable in Luke.

This implied reader wants to be taught. More wants to pray, desires to interact with the teaching. On this view, my little bit of speculation this morning, God, the Holy Spirit, anticipates postmodern reader response theory in a sense.

That is, the reader is actually in the text, has found his way by way of comment into the text. Some manuscripts have it, some don't, but it was such a good comment from the first Christians, maybe Luke himself, maybe a friend of Luke, maybe Paul once said to Luke, oh, it's if that Pharisee, thanks for telling me that parable that Jesus taught, it's almost if that Pharisee was praying with himself and it found its way into the manuscript.

[33 : 56] So there's a reader in the parable already, ready. Formally, the historical critical tradition which we're all so familiar with in this room may be baptized into the service of humble, godly, obedient, godly, obedient, gospel reading.

Heaven will always have its way. The wrath of man, if there is wrath in the critical tradition regarding scripture, the wrath of man, even in that form, will end up praising scripture's final author.

There you go, a bit of response to modern day stuff about reading. Pharisee, the Pharisee prayed with himself.

There you go. I wonder how often heaven just hears us praying to ourselves. It's a horrible thought, isn't it? What are we taught in this parable?

Speak plainly, again, in the interest of time, lots of time for conversation about this famous little parable. If someone put a gun to my head and said, now, what does that really finally mean?

[35 : 12] What does it mean? This rather, again, I've created a sense of a bit of a shocker of a parable which puts a very vicious person in the right with God and a man who attempts godliness in the life of Israel far away from God.

what does it teach? I would say it like this. Any path to humility is better than any path to pride. Is that it?

Any path that will lead you to humility is better than any path that will lead you to pride. A very hard lesson. But, so is the final word of the parable.

He who exalts himself will be humbled. And he who humbles himself will be exalted. So says Jesus of Nazareth.

You can count on it. This, this truth is so important that Luke incorporates it into his narrative unfolding of his gospel.

[36 : 23] After this parable, you will know Luke records that people brought children to Jesus. his disciples would not have this. Maybe we would have said that too.

Why? Why would they say, keep away the children? Were children a sign of a lack of seriousness? Were they regarded as a waste of time? Was it just an obvious thing that they're not old enough for understanding?

Keep away the children as Jesus teaches us about humility. Keep them away. They're not serious children. Keep them away.

They're a waste of time. They're not old enough for what we're dealing with here. Dr. Hindmarsh, you'll recall, spoke a while back in this place of the crucial role of children, Roman Catholic and Protestant children, in the birthing of the pietist evangelical movement in the church.

And they have been largely forgotten, haven't they? A self-important, serious tradition, for instance, evangelical Protestantism, for instance, very serious, self-important tradition, overlooks the little children.

[37 : 43] No. The muskling seed really is too small for pride to see, it seems. The Lord deals with the little things, doesn't he?

If you humble yourself, you'll come near to God. If you exalt yourself, no matter how good it is, your reasons for it, God will be far, far away from you.

It's wonderful to see in the New Testament as we're readers and we immerse ourselves in this book. Peter got it, didn't he? 1 Peter 5, 6, famously, humble yourselves therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that in due time, he may exalt you.

And so did James, that great leader of the first church in Jerusalem. A reading appointed for Ash Wednesday, quite well done, Anglican Church.

God opposes the proud, James says so simply. God opposes the proud. He gives grace to the humble. Everywhere in the New Testament you find this, everywhere.

[38 : 47] The whole tradition of the church knows this, knows it sometimes in a delightfully blunt language. Having said that, you want to hear some blunt language, don't you?

I love Soren Kierkegaard, so allow me to quote him once. What a joy it is to know, this is typical of that man, what a joy it is to know that before God, one is always in the wrong.

He's deadly serious. you're always wrong before God. Always. Each of us, no matter how pious and good we are, we're wrong.

When you've done all that I command you, then say, we are unprofitable servants, says Jesus. It's a joy to know that before God, one is always in the wrong.

Kierkegaard is so profound there. It just means we don't have to justify ourselves anymore. Give it up. Just give it up. We're all sinners. God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[39 : 53] Worthily repenting our sins, we just prayed. Worthily repenting our sins, acknowledging our wretchedness. That's what the tax collector did.

He would have made a great Anglican. He may have been one, who knows. Early form. Maxine Hancock as we drive to the end of this put John Dunn before us last year.

Remember the line from Dunn in his poem that she had in front of us just like this? Oh, think me worth thine anger? John Dunn knew the gospel.

Do you think me God worth your anger? You just knew I'm so far away from God. It's that poem where he's going the wrong way at Lent.

He can't even look at God's face. Think me worth thine anger. What meaning is there? This is the Pharisee, the Pharisee that's in us all and that we must learn that truth.

[41 : 08] Do you even think me worth your anger God? a completely different sensibility, if I can use that word again, that the scriptures are meant to form in us as we read them, as we saturate ourselves in them.

That's it. There's the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Publican, old-fashioned word up there. Just a closing kind of word. The leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, the Honorable Michael Ignacev, you'll recall.

He studied with Isaiah Berlin at Oxford, didn't he? Mr. Berlin wrote a biography, no, Mr. Ignacev, excuse me, wrote a biography of Mr.

Berlin. He must have enjoyed the teaching being taught by him. Mr. Berlin wrote a famous essay. Have you read it? It's a beautiful, if you ever see it, do read it.

It's called The Hedgehog and the Fox. In short, it's about types of mind, or the ruling sensibility which rules in reflective people than in authors.

[42 : 17] The Hedgehog's a strange title, it's a fragment from some Greek poem. The Hedgehog knows one big thing, wants a kind of unifying vision of the world.

Forget the examples that Mr. Berlin gives, Hegel would be an obvious example. The Fox, on the other hand, is a natural polymath. It wants to know many, many things, and is perhaps suspicious of unifying visions, or resist them.

Perhaps Aristotle would be the polymath par excellence. I like this kind of map. It may be quite instructive in sort of understanding the world and different thinkers and different kinds of literature that we all like.

Pascal pictures our world as composed of two kinds of people as well. Pascal, the great Christian. And at Lent, his characterization of these two people is very much worth remembering.

I've quoted it in this place before. I'm sure you'll remember it. Forgive me for quoting it again. Remember that in our parable this morning, there are two people. Perhaps our Lord liked to think that finally, I think the Jewish tradition has this two ways, way of following the law, way of declension from the law.

[43 : 34] Here are two people in this parable. Our Lord is very much in his tradition as he teaches like this. Pascal says there's two kinds of people in the world. They represent us all.

Pascal got this from reading the scriptures and immersing himself in them. But Pascal famously said there are two kinds of people in the world.

The evil who think they're good and the good who know they are evil. I think that is profoundly true and it captures much of the sensibility again of the New Testament.

Maybe we're all involved in this strange choice along life's way. Are we a Pharisee or are we a tax collector? It's a strange choice.

But there you are. Perhaps that's our perpetual daily choice. But finally, finally we know all of this in the truth of the gospel, which reveals a God who confers righteousness upon sinners.

[44 : 44] That's the best thing to know as you're a reader of the gospels. Jesus in his death gives us a righteousness that we don't deserve. I hope the tax collectors that he knew receive that righteousness.

And which truths will keep us reading always along life's way. Reading, I hope we read in joy finding the gospel.

It's a joy to read and a great joy to read the gospel. Reading it in joy indeed. Thanks be to God. So let me say a word of closing prayer and then we'll have time for discussion.

Lord, we thank you that you came and patiently taught your church. Help us to be good readers of your teaching.

Readers who on the last day will not be ashamed of our reading because it formed in us obedience and gratitude for your many gifts to us.

[46 : 08] Well, what do you think?

Total misreading this morning? For me, it strikes me that this Pharisee is kind of giving himself a report card.

And I wonder if this is a temptation with all legalistic types of faith. I'm thinking Islam, I'm also thinking perhaps Catholicism, where a work kind of salvation is preached.

And so, looking at your works and giving them a value, this was good. I'm not, what is he not, an extortioner, he's not like other men, I'm just adulterer and so on.

He's getting A's here. And he sort of is encouraging God to affirm this judgment he has made of himself.

[47 : 22] And that is just so off track, you know, that I wonder if this is why we have this parable. I mean, the tax collector isn't saying what he's done wrong, he's just saying nothing that I have done merits your mercy, but I'm asking for it anyway.

I like his humility, I think Michael would have liked his humility. Yes, yes, yes, but as the lawyer for the defense, I want you to deal with my, I would step forward and say, your honor, the scriptures say, come out from among them and be separate.

And that's why, Israel was taught sometimes to be separate. No, not viciously, deep, profoundly express separation from sinners.

That was their role in the world. And my client is just obeying the scriptures. The Pharisee was a serious Jew.

And he's just saying point blank, I've done it. I hear you, Sheila, I hear you, of course.

[48 : 54] I can't help but Tom Wright, you know, loves to say that the traditions always, you know, are the traditions. So Protestants always read the Bible as Luther versus the papacy.

So of course these Pharisees are Roman Catholics and we're on the side of the good guys. They're trying to be holy and we're not. But I hear you, of course.

Yeah, he's, is there caricature in this? Is there, you know, I thank thee that I'm not like other men. Extortioners, unjust, adulterers.

He's even praying apparently right in the very presence of the tax collector. I'm not like that guy. But yes, he's, as portrayed, he's very, very self-assured in his piety.

Harvey? Oh, sir, yes. The Kierkegaard statement runs into a bit of trouble there, doesn't he? Because he pluralized his own fault.

[50 : 08] I mean, he could have said, I am always wrong before God. Was that his words? I'm always wrong. But a joy it is to know that in the presence of God we're always in the wrong.

Yeah, he can speak for himself. But he can't throw that any wider than himself. He thinks he's speaking, he's speaking a gospel word there, he thinks. He begins to know that he is.

I'm always wrong, of course. But he gives up what he says. You know, we've all fallen short. You know, what I'm saying? I think it's a mistake to talk that way. I'm not saying, you know, that I don't fall into that category.

You're not like other men. He's right. Well, that's right. Well, he was a philosopher. They're usually wrong. I have that problem.

But as soon as he throws it wider with something he's experienced himself, he becomes a Pharisee. Well, I know. Kierkegaard is a Pharisee.

[51 : 17] He may have been. He was a Dutchman. Whatever he was. But there's truth in both of those prayers, isn't there? There's truth in both of those prayers.

God doesn't reject truth. He rejects the spirit of what people speak. That was possibly exactly right. What the Pharisee prayed, he did all those things.

He just didn't go far enough. If he did, it's not recorded. It's a punchy parable, I think, the more you look at it.

So if we can be truthful in our prayer, whatever it is, are we wrong with God? Even if we offered in the wrong spirit.

That was my lame conclusion, is that any path that leads to pride is to be aided. Any path that leads to humility. But what, I mean, so Jesus is saying that in a most extreme way.

[52 : 32] This vicious, non-practicing Jew sold out to the Romans, who's an oppressor, comes merely, do I say merely? Comes to the recognition of his sinfulness.

Expresses that in the house of prayer. Goes home justifying. He somehow got to the place of humility.

God called Moses the most humble, and yet he was seen in that particular little passage where whoever is not being humble.

So we don't always get the right impression of people. Yes, yes, yes. Do you find that the teachings of Jesus should be deeply absorbed for oneself and not used as a tool to start summing up the other person?

We often do. The spirit of judging the other person comes over so easily. Well, the pastor doesn't live like that. Does he? Or just quietly, we start looking around for someone who's supposed to be a Christian rather than say, I will apply it to myself.

[53 : 57] Kierkegaard says somewhere, I think very helpfully, he says, make lots of excuses for the other person's behavior. None for yourself. He gets it just right there, I think.

Make a string of excuses for the other person. Not for yourself. I think the Pharisee just didn't know how to repent. I mean, he didn't want to repent.

He wanted to tell God that I'm obeying your call to be separate from sin. The scriptures say that. Be separate. I'm separate, says the Pharisee.

I'm in obedience to God's word. I mean, the Pharisee's going for lots of criticism from Jesus all over the place.

So I'm just... He doesn't go out of his way to tell us why the Pharisee's wrong here. Does he? The Lord expects us to read, ponder exactly what is his problem.

[55 : 13] Jesus does read him as now exalting himself wrongly, I guess, the last word. Let God exalt you. We all want to be exalted.

Let God do that. Don't you do it. Aren't we presented being faultless before his throne in the cross of Christ?

You know, our salvation. Sure, that's... Yeah. We are presented faultless to come. So we're always in the wrong.

Yes, we are to repent, but we have comfort in our salvation. What? What's that? Yeah, we read in the gospel.

We are presented thoughtless to come. You heard my last line. Thank you. I guess. Read in the gospel for sure. Just thought, I don't know, this guy could be this guy, this taboo gatherer.

[56 : 17] He could be the thief on the cross, couldn't he? That's just the one final acknowledgement of the truth about things. Remember, a sinner.

That's all he said. He got it right at the end. His path, as horrible as it was, led to humility. The Pharisee's path, as pious and good as it was in many ways, led to pride and his apparent destruction.

Well, Boeing? You could, of course, see that the Pharisee and the tax collector are equals and that their authorities should be obeyed.

The Christ is to obey. Is that how you read it? Yeah. Yeah, well, the tax collectors are model prayer.

He prays well. Well, no, well, no, just the, as a tax collector for Caesar, he used to be obeyed by Christians. Well, yeah, just, yeah, well, yeah, we get that from the apostles, you know, honor to whom honor is due, revenue to whom remedy is due, or to be good citizens.

[57 : 33] Jane, you? Yeah, I just, the steps I have which, I guess it's kind of been stated anyway, but the, the Pharisee has an exalted opinion of himself in terms of his relationship with God, so that's really, the impression I get is that he doesn't really have sense of who he is in relation to God where the other tax collector does, and that's why God would respond to him on the Pharisee.

That's good, yes. I'm not sure if Luke sets up, I can, you can over-read, under-read, you can do a lot of, you can make a lot of errors when you read.

Luke, very much in the vicinity of this parable, and it's later, I recall, has the story, the very simple story of good master, what must I do to be saved? Jesus says, why do you call me good?

No one's good but God, and then he's, and then Jesus says, you know the commandments? And he lists a few of them, don't steal, don't commit adultery, that sort of thing. Well, this is what the Pharisees do. He's just obeying the commandments.

So, if I'm, maybe I'm over-reading, but Luke may set up little, little echoes in a room of teaching, saying, yes, the commandments are to be honored. This Pharisee's not wrong in obeying the commandments.

[59 : 04] You're not supposed to be an adulterer, you're not supposed to extort, you're not supposed to be unjust, you're not supposed to be like a tax collector, these monsters. You're not supposed to be like these, he's got that right, but he's on a path to pride, even as he's right.

As I read it, therefore he's wrong. And that, I mean, maybe I'm being overly, but I think Luke may be doing that in his, in his brilliant masterpiece of a gospel.

So, yes. In other areas, Jesus said, you know, the Pharisee criticized Jesus for healing.

Yeah. They were, they were a useless bunch in many ways. Thank you. Thank you. I've often said that about the clergy myself. Bishops.

Have you ever met Bishops? Sorry. We're not being taken, though. Sandy? I wonder, you know, like reading it today, if we don't come to faith like the tax collector, recognize our sin, and with the gift of humility, we repent, but we can slip into the Pharisee role as we connect with the establishment, the church.

[60 : 27] It's a bit fluid there. Sure. Well, thank you for saying that. Exactly. It's a very, it's a subtle thing. We want new repentance and we're entering too.

Yeah. Thank you. Yes. I think that's really helpful. And as listening to the passage being read, thinking about the actual position of the two people, you think of the Pharisee and then think of what the tax collector was doing, but the Pharisee's bragging to God about how good he is.

He's got his eyes up and open enough that he can look at the fellow next to him who's got his eyes down and is beating himself on the breast and he has enough time to criticize him for that.

He's, not only is he bragging to God, he's passing judgment on the man beside him, even in the physical. And I wonder whether there's a tendency in all of us, we come to church and I'm so busy worshiping and I see somebody else having a different kind of experience with God and I tend to begin criticizing them and who they, you know, they're not doing it my way.

It just seems so striking that, you know, one man looking up, eyes open, looking around and the other man head down, beating his own breast. It's such a radical difference between the two men.

[61 : 38] you might say, tell me if I'm, in Christian, in Christian history, the exegesis of this has been so overwhelmingly successful that the Pharisees have just lost, man, they are just automatically bad.

Their profile is bad. I'm trying, in the, in our Lord's particular moment, that would, in anything, they may have had enemies, they may have been resented, but they were still a kind of obvious spiritual elite.

They were, they were, they were doing what, apparently, their historical roots come out of, of the return to Jerusalem and different parties that formed them that said, why were we sent in exile?

We were sent in exile because we didn't obey the law. That's clearly what the prophets had taught. We must intensify, deeply intensify obedience to the law to be in the covenant as we should.

that's, of course, I'm sure there are permutations and changes all the time regarding these groups. They're, some of them were apparently very wealthy. Josephus puts their number at about 6,000.

[62 : 47] They, very small group if his numbers are right. But they, they came to be, are they friends or enemies of Jesus in the gospels? They're, they're a bit of both, aren't they?

I'm sure some of them came to faith when they, when the resurrection message was proclaimed that some Pharisees, some John says, some of them believed that Jesus was Messiah because they loved the praises of men rather than the praise of God.

They, they kept their distance but they had discerned that he was the Messiah in some of them. I'm going to be, now, I'm going to be, uh, identified now with Pharisees because I'm, I'm defending them.

Gee, my friends. Dr. Hill. Harvey, uh, thinking of how Paul portrays the old self and the new self while we're in this fallen world, both are alive.

And I'm wondering if we can see in ourselves both the Pharisees and the, and the, and the public. I mean, it seems very unhealthy in a way to have a split personality.

[64 : 04] And yet, of course, the liturgy says that there is no health within us. We, we have that tension. Can we read this as really talking about us in both senses?

Well, yes. Yes, I, I want to go that route in my, my, my little allusion to we are the temple. and that there could be this prayer tendencies in us all.

Yes, we're all, we've all got that, both tendencies in us. Someone in the room who's learned it, and there's, I know there's many, in, in, you know, in our opening prayer, perfect remission, or is it, remission from our sins.

Now, as I recall, that means that they might diminish in us, become powerless ultimately in us. Remission, at least, I looked up remission in the dictionary once.

We have this tendency in this, don't we, Phil, about how do you get rid of it? How do you, how do you practice taking steps to be lowly? I just want to do that.

[65 : 20] It's a private thing. We don't talk about it publicly. To humble yourself, Peter says. Take the, Ben Witherington, the great biblical scholar, argues quite convincingly, maybe he's wrong, you know, biblical scholars.

He's a believer, Witherington. That Paul lived down all his life. That he was a sophisticated chap. He probably dressed down.

He, in his travels, he would have always been with lowly people. He lived a lowly life and he chose to do it because it created the, he believed it created the power of Jesus in him.

That's what his Lord wanted him to do. He lived down. I wonder if he's got that right, Witherington. I think, I suspect he does. Paul would have been that kind of guy, that kind of man.

He humbled himself. That was concrete and real. God be merciful to me, a sinner. That's profound, isn't it, that prayer?

[66 : 28] God be merciful to me, a sinner. Does this tie in? Speaking of speaking with you, Dr. Hill, does this tie in with Mr. Tinder next week?

I'm looking forward to your talk next week. Yes. You have painfulness. Self-discovery. Is that what it's about? Gosh. It's much better than that. Sounds lengthy.

Well, thank you for your patience, good people. Thank you. Thank you.