

Confident

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 November 2009

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

- [0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Gracious God, as we come to your word now, we ask that we might be challenged again as we walk this road with Jesus to Jerusalem.
- Father, we pray that you might clear up misconceptions that we have of what it means to be your disciple. And Lord, if we are looking to anything else but Jesus for our justification, then Lord, help us to clearly see that this morning, that we might trust in him and him alone.
- And we ask it for your sake. Amen. I heard the story of a young lad who mounted a campaign just before Christmas in order to secure a brand new bike at Christmastime.
- And he badgered his parents to the point where one day his mother said to him, confusing Jesus with Santa, well, why don't you go and write a letter to Jesus and tell him that you deserve this bike?
- And so the young lad trudged off upstairs, started to write the letter, dear Jesus, I've been good all year. And he thought to himself, no, that's not really true.
- [1 : 1 6] He screwed up the piece of paper and threw it away and started again, dear Jesus, I've been good for the last six months. And he thought, well, that's not really true either. I mean, at the very least, this guy's a realist.
- He started again, dear Jesus, I've been good all week. Frustrated, he just screwed the paper up and threw it away. He knew that wasn't true. So in his frustration, he walked downstairs, walked to the mantelpiece where the nativity scene was, picked up Mary, walked back upstairs, plonked it on his desk.
- Dear Jesus, if you ever want to see your mother again, he had a few things worked out about Jesus. He knew that Mary was Jesus' mother.
- That's a good start. But in terms of how to relate to God, it was kind of more like a terrorist. He was trying to force God's hand. And that's the story we have here.
- The Pharisee and the tax collector helps us in our confusion about how to relate to God. Although we read a large chunk there of the narrative, it's all kind of interconnected. But I just want to hone in, particularly in the Pharisee and the tax collector.
- [2 : 2 3] We see the Pharisee and the tax collector being spelled out for us in the story of the young children and then following on with the rich young ruler.
- They are, if you like, the Pharisee and the tax collectors in this story as well. And so let's just hone in on these two stark characters, comic characters.
- The issue that Jesus wants to address here is very clear for us. In verse 9, it says, To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable.
- To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable. But it's not just looking down on other people.
- He's not just saying, Hey, it's just not a kind thing to do. Look down on other people. He spills out quite clearly that the core issue here is a core issue of our standing before God.

[3 : 24] Verse 14, I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. That's the core issue. The core issue is, Do I trust in myself or do I trust in Jesus in order to be right with God?

That's the issue Jesus wants to address here. How to be right with God. This story is all about people who are self-confident, self-righteous, and somehow think that that makes them okay with God.

Jesus, and this is the clutcher for us, Jesus was particularly talking to people who make some sort of attempt at religion. You could just imagine Jesus eyeballing the Pharisees at this point and his disciples at this point because it was specifically those guys who he was addressing.

You could say that Jesus is talking to people like us gathered here right now. And his message for us is very clear.

God is not pleased by self-confidence or self-righteousness. He is only pleased with people who come to him for their righteousness. So let's have a look at it.

[4 : 38] We know from verse 10 that there are two men who go up to the temple to pray, but in verse 14, it says that only one of them goes home okay with God. Only one of them goes home as a friend of God.

It's kind of like, if you ever watch the movie Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome, there is this post-war situation, and if two people get into a bit of biff, they would go into the Thunderdome and sort it out, and when they go into the Thunderdome and sort it out, it was like to the death, that is, this chant would go up, two men enter, one man leaves, two men enter, one man leaves.

And you kind of get that feeling as these two men go into the temple, you know that as Jesus' story goes, only one of these guys is going to come out having any form of meaningful relationship with God.

We are told that one of them is a tax collector, the other is a Pharisee, and again, I know I've said this before, we need to come back to it, we are in danger of mucking it up right from the start because we are familiar with the Bible, and we automatically, as Christian people, go boo his to the Pharisees because we know that Jesus, you know, kicked the Pharisees in the guts all the time.

We know the Pharisees are the bad guys, they're the ones that Jesus consistently hammers, and so we need to try and hear this story as it would have been for first century Palestine, in there, for Jesus' friends, for Peter, James and John and the rest of the boys, they would have known that the tax collector was the scum, they knew that, the tax collector was the guy who wore the black hat, he was the guy who rode around on the mean looking camel, he was the one that no one really liked very much, he was the low life of first century Palestine, he was filth, he was traitor, they sold out God for money, they were not welcomed in a place of worship, he was scum, the Pharisee, on the other hand, was deeply, deeply respected, it's hard to imagine how deeply respected a Pharisee was in first century Palestine, they were the guys who wore the white hats, right, they wore the respectable camels, you know, the nice ones with the smile and the speed limited camels, they were the kind of, they were the kind of the Camry drivers of first century Palestine, they were not men who made their living out of religion, they were regular church attendees who were deeply, deeply serious and set the pace for everyone else, in Jesus' day the people would go boo his scumbag tax collector but the Pharisee definitely not, the Pharisee is the guy who is dead earnest about God, a valued member of society and a very valued member of the community of God's people, well that's the two extraordinary men, now let's look at their two extraordinary prayers because their prayers reveal what their heart is like, let's look at the Pharisee's prayers, now I occasionally,

[7 : 44] I'll let you in a bit of my psyche here, occasionally enjoy the read of the personal ads of a paper, you know, I don't know if you've ever done that before but I can't ever imagine what it would mean for someone to actually advertise their finer points and ask for someone to love them kind of thing, I find that kind of odd and it must be kind of frustrating for them example, I read this one, 30 year old, 6 foot tall, brown hair, green eyes, 6 lady, 21 to 28 year old for friendship and or relationship and it's like, haven't you got anything else to offer?

He's 30 year old, 6 foot tall, brown hair, green eyes, well that just pretty much opens it up, that's him putting his good foot forward, that's him advertising his higher points, now I've got to understand here that I've never read a personal ad where someone highlights their negative points, you know, I like to sleep in, I don't have a job, looking for a house for my greyhounds, you know, that's, you know, like I've never ever seen that, looking for someone to cook and clean for me, is there anyone out there who's willing to take on this gig?

I've never seen that, that is because our natural human tendency is to put our best foot forward, we always put our best foot forward, we promote ourselves and it's no different when it comes to our relationship with God, our nature is to outline the wonderful things that we are or that we do and we don't mention the things that we do too wrong, too often, unless we are absolutely confronted with it and have to, we even go to the point of justifying our wrongdoing by giving them different kind of names which kind of lessen the sin of it, so I don't evade tax, I just minimise tax, I don't lie, I just, you know, occasional white lie, I don't gossip, I share prayer points, I don't ridicule people because I was just kind of joking and I'm not committing adultery, I'm having an affair or a midlife crisis, I didn't steal the stamps from work, I borrowed the stamps from work and by the time that we've justified our position, we're kind of like, actually,

I'm not that bad after all, but God knows our hearts and so the Pharisee prays like this in verse 11, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like that tax collector over there, I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all that I get.

Now, it is so easy to send this guy up because I think that's exactly what Jesus is doing here. Hey God, I am just ever so terribly marvelous, God.

[10 : 39] But, you know, the awful thing about it, the way he does it, is he spiritualizes it. Thank you, God.

Thank you, God, that you've made a difference in my life. Thank you, God, that you've changed me. Thank you, God, that I'm not like other people. Thank you, God, that I'm not like that scumbag tax collector sitting over there.

He spiritualizes it, thanks God for it because he even recognizes that God has made a change in his life. He then goes on, explains how he's different from other people.

He fasts twice a week, he says. That is, he goes without food twice a week. Normal Jewish practice by this time was that you did it once or twice a year and occasionally as you felt like it.

And this guy does it twice a week. He is really serious about his relationship with God. But not just that. It says here he gives a tenth of all that I get.

[11 : 48] I give a tenth of it all. He tithes his herb garden. He gives some of his peas away.

This guy is thoroughly religious. He's keeping the command of God to the letter of the law. And so he says, God, I must be okay.

But the problem is, is his evaluation of himself is based on the wrong standard. He compares himself with other people on the surface and he doesn't look deep, deep in his heart.

He looks at the tax collector and goes, I must be okay because I'm clearly not as bad as that guy. And that is our normal human tendency. We do it by default.

When it comes to morality, we look down the line. When it comes to riches, we look up the line because there's always someone richer than me. That means I don't have to be so generous because someone else should be. But I look down the line when it comes to morality because there's always someone worse than me.

[12 : 54] And that makes me feel good. I know a guy who is serving two consecutive life sentences in Long Bay Jail. He killed a mother and her baby.

And he was in the same wing of Long Bay Jail as the Milpera Bicycle Massacre guys. You know, the guys had the shootout in Milpera years ago.

One day those bikey guys grabbed this guy, they beat him up and poured boiling water all over him for daring to murder a baby.

How dare you do that, you scumbag. Now, these are the guys who gun down a seven-year-old girl. If she was seven, it's kind of different.

When it comes to morality, we look down the line and even when you're sitting, languishing in a prison cell in Long Bay Jail, there is always someone worse than you. It is our default position.

[13 : 58] Even people who should know better, consequence of their sin, they live it for the rest of their life around them, still look down the line. And I think Jesus says very clearly that that is our normal human tendency and how much easy it is for us, the religious people, to do it.

The tax collector is in total contrast to the Pharisee. He beats himself on the chest and he says, God have mercy on me, a sinner.

Who does he compare himself with? Well, nobody as far as we can tell from the text. A better reading of this statement is, God have mercy on me, the sinner.

He's not trying to find comfort in the fact that he's part of a large group in the same boat. He doesn't say, sure, I've made a few mistakes, I've made even some really big mistakes, I acknowledge my mistakes, but I'm no different than anyone else, I'm only human after all.

He says, God, I am the sinner. I am the model sinner, I am the essential sinner. He doesn't care how he compares with other people, he doesn't even look to the Pharisee, he just knows he's not okay with God and he cries out in despair.

[15 : 29] And Jesus says that that scumbag goes home justified by God while the other is rejected. The scumbag tax collector goes home with God as his friend.

The way that we are always to approach God is God have mercy on me, the sinner. The fulfillment of religious duties doesn't put us in God's good books.

There is no other way to be right with the God of this universe than to ask him for mercy through Jesus. And we need to all do that. Don't expect to get into God's good books by the terrorist method and to make demands of God.

Don't expect to get there by the resume method and give him a big list of all my finer points and hopefully they will outbalance my bad points and God will be okay. God is not impressed by the resume method, even the resume method of religious people.

And that's when Jesus eyeballs us. No, no, forget that. That's when Jesus eyeballs me. Because in reality, I am more religious than the average Aussie bloke.

[16 : 47] I read the Bible, I pray, I go to church, hang out at church. In fact, I live at church. I've got a theological degree and something else called a diploma in ministry, not that anyone knows what that is.

I work full-time in ministry. I travel around the country and speak to church leaders and train church leaders. I read deep theological books.

I run youth ministry programs. And I even get to wear a dress. I look religious. I'm probably more religious than anyone here.

Are you impressed? God's not. God's not. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that we impress God by what we do.

Anyone who says that there is something religious activity, some form of religious activity that you must do is wrong. He's wrong.

[17 : 58] The best case scenario is I think potentially the first believer. If he wasn't the first believer, he's certainly the first guy to follow Jesus into heaven. you know the bloke?

He's stuck up there on the cross beside Jesus. He's on the cross beside Jesus and he says to Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. That is, he recognized who Jesus was.

It was a statement of faith and trust in Jesus, the guy who was dying beside him on the cross. He recognized that Jesus must be a king because he's going into his kingdom and his kingdom is going to come when he dies.

And so what did Jesus say to this guy? Yeah, mate, not a problem. If you can manage to get yourself down off the cross and get off the church, then guarantee you can be part of the kingdom. No, that wasn't it.

Or did he say, hey disciples, bring up the hoses, we need to baptize this guy. No, that wasn't it. Today you will be with me in paradise.

[19 : 02] Today you will be with me in paradise. God is because he put his faith in Jesus. Christianity isn't about self-righteousness, it is about God-given righteousness and that man had it right there and then on the cross.

Without any activity, on the cross, God-given righteousness. But there is a message here for us, not just for those who need to put their trust in Jesus, but that for those of us who have put our trust in Jesus, it is so easy for us to start with faith in Jesus.

We look at where we are, where we're at, what God has done for us, and it seems like a pretty simple choice to put our trust in Jesus. But it's easy to move from that faith in Jesus and back into religion and start having confidence because of what I do.

it's often a subtle shift, but it's so easy to do it. The longer and longer you've been a Christian, the more that God has worked in you and changed you and you've been in church and you go to youth group and you go to read the Bible and pray and you're involved in all these Christian activities and you hang around with Christian people and you kind of get changed.

changed. And you can start looking down on others. Even just within the church, you can start looking down on others. It's so easy for your shift to happen from faith back into who you are and what you've done for Jesus.

[20 : 42] You start to think maybe I'm not that bad after all. God must be impressed with me. And so you start putting your trust in religion. And so the question for us is, are we totally looking away from ourselves?

When you see yourself standing before the King Jesus, the Holy Judge, what are you going to look to?

What are you going to trust in? Let me say that it would be absolutely shocking for us to have read that Bible passage and not be terrified by those four words in the middle of verse 14.

Terrified by those four words in the middle of verse 14. I tell you, this man, that is the tax collector, went down to his house justified.

And here are the four words, rather than the other. Rather than the other.

[22 : 04] The Pharisee, the righteous one, the one thanking God for his righteousness, righteousness, was not justified. He was condemned.

People who trust in the righteousness that God has worked in them for the basis of their acceptance and acquittal and justification before God do not go down to their house justified.

people who really believe that the righteousness that God helps them do in this life is a sufficient basis for their justification, Jesus says, will not be justified before God.

So, Paul's, this is very serious. Very serious. we are not justified by the righteousness that Christ works in us, but by the righteousness that Christ is for us.

Let me say that again. We are not justified by the righteousness that Christ works in us, but the righteousness that Christ is for us.

[23 : 26] Me having a reverent in front of my name, a theological degree at the end of my name, and all the works that I do in between day after day after day for God's glory mean deadly squat for my justification.

And if you don't know what deadly squat is, it means nothing. And so I plead with you today on behalf of Jesus that for your justification, you do not look to, that you do not trust in what God has worked out in you.

Instead, look to and trust in Christ alone and all that God is for you in him. 2 Corinthians 5, God made him to be seen who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And so hear the words of Jesus again, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Everyone who ensuring himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Thank you.