

# Saint vs. Scoundrel - Or So You'd Think

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Preacher: Rich Chasse

[ 0 : 00 ] Here is a typical classroom picture from a generation or two ago. Actually, 1971.

Imagine a little second grade boy visiting with his grandmother on Mother's Day.

! He's a bully.

He hits other kids. And then he says, that's Susie. She just never listens. I don't know about her.

That's Billy. He never does his homework. He just doesn't listen at all. There's Sally. Sally loves to boss the other kids around.

[ 1 : 03 ] That's how she is. And there's Frankie. He just misbehaves. He just flat out misbehaves. Oh, and there's me. Just me.

Just minding my own business. That is actually me in the second row with the yellow shirt. Oh! Just minding my own business.

And then her combustors and her combustors and her combustors and her combustors and her!

Listen, we learn at a very young age the art of comparison.

We can compare ourselves to other people and make ourselves look as good or as bad as we want to be. It just depends on who we pick out to compare ourselves to.

And we don't tend to grow out that tendency, grow out of that. We continue that even into adulthood. And it can be a real blind spot for a believer.

[ 2 : 10 ] And it can be a blind spot for those people who think they are a true follower of God. And that's the subject that we're looking at this morning.

It's the subject of our story, our parable. That's the issue that Jesus is going to deal with. It is the issue of religion. And if you've been around here for any length of time, you know that I say that I hate religion.

And if there was ever a poster child of a story or a passage of scripture that would be the poster child of what religion is all about, this passage would be it.

And it's why I struggle with the idea of religion. As much as I hate the idea of religion, I still struggle with it.

I would dare to think all of us struggle with this idea of religion, comparing ourselves to other people in that way. He starts off the parable, as last week he did, with the parable of the persistent widow and the evil judge.

[ 3 : 19 ] He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves. What a place to find yourself. Those who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

That's a way to live. And yet religion promotes this kind of thinking. It's the idea that, yeah, I'm pretty good. I'm a pretty good person.

I pray. I go to church. I give. I do all these right things. And especially compared to old so-and-so over here or old so-and-so over there, I'm doing pretty good.

That's what we're talking about here. That's what Jesus is getting at here. That it's possible to see yourself as righteous and yet unsaved, yet not a believer.

To be able to look at everyone else in the classroom and grade them on a scale of, well, they're probably enough. Or maybe, if I'm generous, a D plus.

[ 4 : 25 ] And yet to look at myself and say, well, I'm probably at least an A. If I'm being honest, an A plus. I'm doing just fine.

He goes on and it says this way. It says, two men went up into the temple to pray. And to set the backdrop of this parable, I want to tell you what was kind of a constant thing in their day.

They had two separate times per day that people would go and pray. Basically, it would equate to our 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. where people could go to the temple at those times of day.

And there would be a sacrifice of a lamb, sacrificed for the sins of the people. And incense would be burning and people would be gathering there at the court of Israel.

The Jews would come and would gather there. And there would be a special place set up where the priest would come after the sacrifice. And he would pronounce a blessing on the people.

[ 5 : 26 ] And there would be some prayers that would be recited. It was common then for people to have memorized prayers that would be recited.

Some of you maybe have grown up with that or familiar with that kind of mindset. But there was also a time for what they would refer to as free praying.

It was praying just basically that would flow out of a person's heart. And you could see a person's heart or hear a person's heart if you could hear how they prayed during their times of free prayer.

Because then they could take that time and pray about anything that they wanted to. And it was then he introduced the two characters who were coming in this story to pray.

One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. And we've been at this Gospel of Luke long enough to know that when we introduce two characters here, one a Pharisee, one a tax collector, you kind of already know that the Pharisee is going to be set up as being the bad guy.

[ 6 : 31 ] And the tax collector, however weird it might sound, is going to end up being the hero of the story, or at least the one who ends up looking better than the Pharisee.

But rest assured that in that day as Jesus is telling this story, that's not how his audience would have received this. And I want to ask you if it's possible to suspend how you normally would perceive this story, just assuming that the Pharisee is really the bad guy, and to put yourself in the position of the average person there who was listening to Jesus tell this story.

He's gone from now speaking to the disciples, this larger crowd of people who were following Jesus, and now he's actually speaking to the Pharisees, those who considered themselves self-righteous.

They wouldn't put the word self in front of it. They just considered themselves righteous. But that's who he is addressing. And of course, the rest of us get to listen in on this story as Jesus tells it.

But he's telling it for their benefit, and really for the benefit of all of us as well. And that crowd, as they would have heard this story, would have thought, well, okay, the Pharisee, this is the cream of the crop.

[ 7 : 51 ] The Pharisees were the good guys in their mindset. These were the most righteous people in their communities. You would have wanted to have one of these guys potentially as your neighbor.

These were the people who were, you know, they did the right things. They said the right things. They were considered godly. They certainly were respected in their community. Tax collector, not so much.

These were people who were also Jewish, so they could have entered into the court of Israel as opposed to the court of the Gentiles. These were genuinely Jewish people, but they were considered traitors to their nation because they were collecting taxes for Rome.

And oftentimes in their duties in collecting taxes, they would extort the people that they were in charge of collecting from, skimming from them in order to increase their own personal wealth while they were gathering taxes for Rome.

And Rome didn't mind that. As long as Rome got what was expected of them, of that community, to come into the coffers, they were fine with whatever else you could gain, however dishonestly you were gaining it.

[ 9 : 08 ] And so tax collectors were basically the worst of the worst. There were the sinners, and then there were the tax collectors, and they were kind of on a rung lower than the sinners.

And so here they are, supposedly the saint and the scoundrel, although which is which at this point. One, they would have expected to be patted on the back and would have thought warmly welcomed. The other would be looked down upon and expected to be kicked out and not accepted at all.

And Jesus tells this parable to see how they pray. What was it that these men, these two men, were praying when it came their time to pray freely, pray from the heart?

The Pharisee, we'll start with him, that's what Jesus does, standing by himself, and he would have stood up to the front close to where the priest would come out and offer his blessing of the people.

[10:12] He prayed thusly, God, I thank you. And it starts off well enough, wouldn't you say? God, I thank you. And we're like, oh, okay, this is a good prayer because he's starting from a heart of gratitude.

He's starting from a heart of thanksgiving. And oh boy, are we in for a shock. I thank you, God, that I'm not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I'm imagining that these two men, probably as they were coming into the gate and entering the temple courts, they may have passed by each other. Certainly we know that they're not positioned in the same place because the Pharisee is more than likely up at the front, and we know from later on that the tax collector stays behind and is at the back of the space, at the outer edges of the space and doesn't want to go further in.

But here he is, thanking God. Not really. He's really just bragging about himself, isn't he? Oh, look at me, God.

I am all that. I'm wonderful. And look, I'm not like these other people, like Tommy and Susie and Sally and Frankie and those other people, right?

[11:42] I'm better than that. I'm not like any of these other people. And he couched praise for himself into his thanksgiving to God.

Lord, just, I'm so wonderful. Matter of fact, if you count the number of the letter I that you find in this passage, in these two verses, you'll count it five times.

He's talking about himself over and over again. Five times he says, I am, I'm, I'm, or I'm not, I'm not, I'm, listen, Lord, thank you. I thank you that I'm not like these extortioners who just steal from other people.

You know, they're probably in jail and can't even be here this morning for this prayer session. But, oh, never mind that I legally take people's money.

I'm able to find a way to skirt and use the law to my advantage to, oh, we wouldn't call it rob people, but I'm just using the law to my advantage.

[12:44] That's what I do and that's how a Pharisee would look at it. Thank you, Lord, that I'm not like these unjust people. I would never, I would never move my property line to gain my advantage.

I would never cheat anyone. I don't have to be generous, mind you. That's going above and beyond and so I'm just going to give the minimum.

That's the heart of the Pharisee. Oh, I'm not an adulterer. I've never stepped out on my wife. It doesn't mean that he loves her.

Probably doesn't really care. But he's kept the letter of the law. I'm not like these other people and comparing himself to them and making himself appear or feel superior to them.

But let's be careful here because we can flip this ourselves and pray something like, Lord, thank you that I'm not like these Pharisees.

[13:59] We can manipulate things to make ourselves even superior. We've got to be careful with that. And then he goes from the negative to the positive.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. Let's not even have a conversation of net versus gross.

I'm giving it all. I give all that I get. I give a tithe of that. And I'm fasting twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays.

Oh, those happen to be the days where people come into the marketplace on Mondays and Thursdays. Never mind that the law really only prescribes one day of fasting per year on the Day of Atonement.

No, no, no, no, no. I go above and beyond that. Matthew chapter 6, Jesus tells us more about their motives of how they do these kinds of things.

[14:57] When they are fasting, they go into the marketplace and they've taken a little bit of ash and they rub it on their cheeks to make them look a little more sullen or they make themselves look weak or they unshuffle their clothes to make it look like they've been spending time in prayer.

And the prayers they pray, they use eloquent language and big words and repetition. They do it all as a show. In Matthew 6, the word when Jesus says they do it for show, the word show, we get our English word theater from it.

They use their giving and their praying and their fasting as a theater, as a show so that people can see how wonderful they are.

Just how much they have done. And it's like, what is that about? Jesus doesn't tell us that Pharisee is lying here.

It may not be that he's lying. But Jesus will tell us a little bit later on that he's lost. Careful about how we use our religion.

[16:25] And then he moves on to the tax collector. The tax collector standing far off. Would not even lift up his eyes to heaven. Couldn't do it.

But beat his breast. You can... Saying, God, be merciful. Be merciful to me, a sinner.

Be merciful to me, not thinking himself of being worthy of receiving this mercy. This beating of his breast, it suggests that he's in mourning.

What's he in mourning over? He's in mourning over his own condition, his own sinful condition. He recognizes himself as a sinner.

That he's unworthy of receiving this mercy that he's pleading for. Listen, there's not going to be any one person who struts their way into heaven thinking, I'm honorable.

[17:35] That's why I'm here. Not going to happen. The verdict is pretty simple. Pretty damning.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified. rather than the other. Who's the other? It's the Pharisee.

Pharisee's not saved. He's lost. He's looking at eternity in hell. But it's interesting that as you look at these two men, these two characters, one of them left that day feeling pretty good.

Yeah, I'm good. You know, I was right there. I received the blessing of the priest that day and I spent time worshiping God and I prayed and I'm all right.

Yeah. It's going to be a good day. But he's lost. He's lost. The other one left that day.

[18:47] I'm guessing feeling pretty lousy. If you're spending time beating your chest and shedding tears and walking out of the temple area wiping away the tears from his face and trying to get himself ready for his day, I don't get the idea that he felt very strong or perhaps even confident.

about his position before God. But Jesus said he was justified. He was right in God's eyes.

Wow. Jesus concludes this matter by saying for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled. The one who humbles himself will be exalted.

You see, even a self-righteous person can be humble. Sort of. Look how humble I am. You can turn being humble or trying to be humble into an expression of self-righteousness.

Oh, I'm so good. Look how humble I am. I want to spend the rest of our time kind of going through some of the characteristics of these two prayers and the two men who pray these prayers.

[20:16] You have these on your notes. The first characteristic of the prayer of the Pharisee or the prayer of the self-righteous person. And I put these for our benefit here because even though you may be a Christian for a long period of time, even though you may understand that Christianity is based not on your good works but on faith in Christ alone.

It has nothing to do with how good you are because you realize you can never be good enough.

You'll never earn it. You can't do that. And yet, even as a Christian, I've been a Christian since I was 17 years old and I still to this day struggle with this idea of religion, of going through the motions, of doing things so that people can see how good of a person I am, of looking at others who don't measure up to me.

I still struggle with that. I think if we're honest, we all can say, yeah, that's something that I need to deal with in my own life.

The prevalent attitude then for this kind of prayer is that of self-trust and contempt for others. To believe that, okay, I'm pretty good.

And you know how this, even for someone who is a believer, you know how this works itself out, right? It's I'm facing some sort of difficulty. I've got something on my plate that I've got to do and here I am thinking, I don't need God for this one.

[21:55] I've got it covered. I don't need to pray about this. I can do this in my own strength, Lord. I got, I'm okay. I'm good today. Do we ever do that?

Do we ever just take God for granted and think, well, I got this today, God. You got some other people you got to take care of. I mean, after all, look at Doug here.

He needs some help. Eric over here, he needs some help, man. I mean, right? But I'm good today.

Do we ever start to think that way?

Do we ever struggle with this? This is the problem that we have. It is a detectable, holier-than-thou mindset that we can develop.

The hypocrisy of the Pharisees was legendary. Of course, the people that Jesus is telling these stories to, they didn't have the Gospels to read and to figure out.

[ 22 : 58 ] Okay, yeah, these Pharisees, they were putting on a good show, but it wasn't real. It was just hypocrisy. Maybe if they looked hard enough and long enough, they might have figured some of this out. But generally speaking, just on an everyday basis, they would have thought their average garden variety Pharisee was a pretty good guy.

But Jesus points this out. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. When Jesus calls you a hypocrite, boy, you better take that seriously.

For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense, make long prayers. See, they were stealing, but they were doing it legally.

So it wasn't theft. It wasn't something that they would be prosecuted for, put in jail for. But Jesus said, look at what you guys are doing. And you're going to receive greater condemnation.

This idea of playing at religion, using it for your own advantage, the Lord does not take this lightly.

[ 24 : 09 ] Their standard of judging others, the standard by which they judge righteousness and unrighteousness, is based on the external. It's based on what people see on the outside.

For them, everything is what they see on the outside. Jesus, remember, would call them whitewashed tombs on the inside. They're dead on the inside. On the outside, they look great.

On the outside, they look white and clean, but on the inside, they're dead. Don't show me your dead religion on the outside. Let me see what's in your heart.

God would say, and they don't really care about that. They focus on outward deeds rather than on the heart. Of course, we know that what God looks at as the heart.

They... The standard by which the self-righteous used to judge goodness is based on comparative actions.

[ 25 : 18 ] They compare themselves to others rather than on the absolute. An absolute standard. You see, I can... I can make myself feel pretty good about myself, right?

By just who I'm looking at and comparing myself to, right? So, generally speaking, I'm not going to compare myself. This is 2026 now.

I'm not going to compare myself to people in this room, right? Because I don't know. I mean, I don't know if I'm really doing any better than any of the people in this room.

But I can find some people online or on my TV screen that I can compare myself to and feel pretty good about myself, right? That's what we do. Social media is famous for that.

And boy, we got to be careful with that. It's not based on that, though. Our standard for judging goodness or righteousness is none other than Jesus Christ himself.

[ 26 : 19 ] And my question would be, how you doing? When Jesus Christ is your standard by which you judge yourself, how you doing? Let's go back to my online thing.

That's easier. It's an easier standard. I can live with myself. But when I compare myself to Jesus, which is, he is our standard after all.

And it's why the scriptures often will say over and over again that I cannot be good in and of myself. I cannot be good enough to earn his favor, to gain salvation of my own merit, of my own goodness.

I don't have any of that. If I'm being honest, if I'm judging by that standard, the self-righteous brazenly approach God with a false sense of their own holiness before God.

the idea that I can approach God on the basis of, yeah, I'm doing pretty well, God, look at me.

[ 27 : 37 ] Whoa. This one, I struggle to understand. I don't know that I've ever really been able to do this. I've always struggled with my own fallenness before God.

Sometimes my actions don't portray that, but if I'm bowing before God in prayer and there's no one else there for me to pretend around, what else am I going to do but to be honest and say, Lord, I can't.

I don't, I don't qualify. I am unworthy. But not these guys. They approach God and they think they have it all going on.

They think they are worthy of that status. The self-righteous have a perverse view of gratitude.

Didn't we see this already? I thank you, Lord, that I'm not like these other guys. Whoa. Where does this kind of thinking come from?

[ 28 : 54 ] This idea. Thanking God for nothing other than what they see in themselves. Lord, you must be so pleased to have me on board. You must, you must be just so proud of your son, rich.

Oh, isn't it great to have me on your team, Lord? That's kind of the mindset. And, and they probably don't say it that way.

Okay? I get that, but that's still the mindset that, that, that comes through. Wow. how, how perverse that really is.

And then here's another aspect that we not see from this. The self-righteous overflow with, with self-love. We're going to see an aspect of this a little bit later in our notes here, but this idea of, of self-love.

They really think a lot of themselves. And yet, at the same time, they are so, very much so, lacking in love for God and for other people.

[ 30 : 12 ] because it's all about them. It's all about me. Now, as we turn our attention to, to looking at the, this tax collector, I, I don't want to confuse you and to say, well, yeah, being a tax collector, that was a good thing.

It really wasn't. It was, it was, they were, their view of, of people looking at them as traitors to the nation of Israel, that's proper view.

They, they, these were not good people. Often, maybe by definition, dishonest, extorting people. We see this multiple times. One of the, the 12 was, Matthew was a tax collector. The story of Zacchaeus, the, the, the wee little guy climbed up in the sycamore tree.

You know, he's a tax collector and he's got to repay people because of what he's, he's done. But here is this unworthy sinner and, and, and, and we have to see ourselves in the same light as the tax collector because we are sinful.

[ 31 : 35 ] I, I don't know what your sin of choice is, but you've got one and, and if you're like me, you've got multiple, right? Sins that you deal with.

And maybe early on in your walk with the Lord, they were more outer and people could see them and, and, and you would, you would repent of those, but then as you repented of those more blatant outward sins, you realize that, man, I've got some sin that people don't necessarily see. I've got some sins that deal with what's in my head and, and what's in my heart and my motives and, and I struggle with these things. And you just, as you walk with the Lord and as you mature with the Lord, you really come to realize just, I really am a desperately wicked person.

And so when we talk about the right approach, to God, we need to approach God then as an unworthy sinner. This never changes.

No matter how mature you are as a Christian, there is a sense now that I'm, as a Christian, I have within me now the righteousness of Christ so when the Lord looks at me, he doesn't see me in my sins.

[ 32 : 56 ] He sees Christ and the righteousness of Christ in me. But again, that's not me. That's Christ, his righteousness that he sees in me, not mine, because I don't have any.

I am, and I continue to be unworthy. It is Jesus who makes me worthy, and without Christ I continue to be unworthy.

Even with Christ, I am unworthy. mercy. We must maintain that mindset. Another aspect of this is pleading for his mercy.

Approach God by pleading for his mercy. Lord, I need your mercy. grace is what the Lord gives us that we do not deserve.

Mercy is kind of the flip side of that coin. Mercy is God not giving us what we do deserve. So I plead for his mercy.

[ 34 : 10 ] mercy. And you might say, okay, Rich, now as a believer, you have received his mercy and you are forgiven, you are forever his, you don't have to worry about losing your salvation, so why do you need to continue to plead for his mercy?

In that sense, I understand why you would ask that question, but let me say this about my standing or my position before God. We should never lose this sense of a desperate dependence on God.

I am forgiven. I have received his grace and his mercy. Those are past tense realities in my life.

But I continue to see myself as being unworthy and I need to continue to see myself as being desperately dependent upon him.

grace and love. We have talked about this in years past, the idea of the gospel being a one-time past tense event, that the moment, the day that I place my trust in Christ as my Savior, I receive this message of the gospel and he saves me, and yet also, there is an ongoing day-by-day need for the gospel in my life because I continue to need his grace and his mercy every day of my life.

[ 35 : 44 ] The moment that I start to think I can do this on my own, and don't try to convince me that you've never done this, because the moment that you spend a day and you've never talked to God in prayer on a given day, you never surrendered to him on that day.

That's a day that you're saying, okay, Lord, I've got this. I can do this myself. I don't need your grace or your mercy today.

It's a dangerous place to live, and yet we've all done it. Even as a pastor, the trap is there every day that if I'm not crying out and dependence on him, Lord, I need you.

I need your grace and your mercy in my life. Absolutely. And then we saw how the Pharisees or the self-righteous people come brazenly, you might use the word confidently, but their confidence was a false confidence based on their own personal holiness, which they don't have.

we can still approach God confidently, absolutely, but not on the basis of our own righteousness, because again, you don't have any of that.

[ 37 : 12 ] But yes, we can come boldly or confidently before the Lord on the basis of Christ's blood and his righteousness, righteousness, not on my own.

So this mindset of, oh, Lord, look at me, I'm wonderful, thank you, Lord, that I'm not like these other guys. That's not the basis on which we can come boldly or confidently.

We're told of this in Hebrews 4, 16, let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

He's writing this to believers. Okay? He's writing this to Christians. Now, these are Hebrew Christians who are struggling with the transition between an Old Testament faith and a New Testament faith.

Right? They're struggling with how do I walk away from the sacrifices at the temple? How do I live out the grace of Christ in my life now? And he says, listen, let us then, then is based on what?

[ 38 : 32 ] Let us then have confidence drawn near, let us then with confidence drawn near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace. Do we still need mercy and grace every day of our lives?

Absolutely. Not just on the day that you trust Christ as Savior, but every day. And on the basis of what then? Let's go back to verse 14.

Since then we have a great high priest. And he spends this whole chapter dealing with how Jesus is our great high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

It's this wonderful truth in the book of Hebrews where he talks about how Jesus is both the sacrifice, he's the Lamb of God, given up himself on the cross, shedding his blood so that we can be forgiven of sin.

He is our sacrifice and he is also the only one qualified to be the high priest to offer the sacrifice.

[ 39 : 36 ] It's a truth that ought to blow us away when we see all that God has put into our redemption, what he caused to happen to bring us to a place of being right with him.

He is our great high priest, but he's not so high and lifted up that he can't identify with our troubles and our hardships and our temptations. Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Let us then come boldly before the throne of grace, confidently before the throne of grace, that we might find grace and mercy to help in our time of need.

Absolutely, we can come confidently and boldly. God, I want to conclude our time this morning kind of going back over these last two parables.

[ 40 : 52 ] The one from last week, the parable of the persistent widow with the wicked judge, the ungodly judge who she needed to pester and persist with and is contrasted between God and us.

The judge does not represent God, the widow does not represent us. Our relationships are different there. And then this parable of these two men who come to the temple to pray, one a self-righteous Pharisee who thinks he's got it all together, versus this sinful, wicked tax collector who understands his position and beats his chest and pleads for God's mercy and is granted God's mercy.

From these parables, then there's some application that I think we can bring to 2026 and our current circumstances. Considering, first of all, the judge and the persistent widow, we should not expect an agnostic political system to act on the basis of character, godliness, or virtue.

How naive I think we become when we think that anyone in our current day, just like with this widow and this judge, who was not, the judge was not agnostic.

Jesus tells us in the story that this judge was actually ungodly. He did not believe in God, didn't care about God, did not regard him at all. And I think it's naive for us to think of our current political system, or anyone involved in that political system, and expect them to act in a way that is godly, that is virtuous, or has any sort of real character.

[ 42 : 51 ] Now, you may find someone who is in a position of authority in our world today who has those characteristics. Catholics, absolutely. But I think more often what you find are people who wear the label of Christian.

You're finding that less and less, by the way. Politicians or people in position of authority who would wear the label of someone who would say, yes, I'm a Christian, and because they wear that label, oh, well, we're going to expect them to do the right thing.

I don't think that's the case. I think it's naive for us to think that that's going to happen. I think what we're going to see most often is that people are going to act out of self-interest. After all, I've got to get elected again.

And that's true on both sides of the aisle. It's true whether Republican, Democrat, or whatever. People are going to, once they're in positions of authority, they're going to act in their own self-interest.

What can I do? What can I get away with? What's the minimum that I have to do in order to get re-elected or to keep my position of authority?

[ 44 : 05 ] That lesson from the judge, I think, helps us to see that. Here's another aspect of this that I find interesting.

And this is maybe one of the longest notes. I struggle to have this all fit on one screen, so bear with me. I have it in chunks here for you to make it a little bit more palatable.

The evangelical movement today struggles with the idea of social justice and what it can and cannot do. Social justice, by the way, anytime you have to put a word before the word justice, if you have to put a modifier before the word justice, in the same way that you would put a modifier before the word Christian, it's going to poison the word.

So social justice, if you put social in front of the word justice, it poisons the word justice. Okay? It makes it mean something or trying to do something that the gospel does not intend.

We ought to be a people who stand for justice, period, social or otherwise. do we want to feed people? Absolutely.

[ 45 : 21 ] Do we want to help the poor to rise up and provide for themselves? Absolutely. People in need, the widow, the orphan? Absolutely.

We want to help people in need. That's a part of it. But where we go off, where the evangelical movement has gone off the rails in the last few decades is this.

It's not that we stop promoting the idea of justice. We need to still promote justice. Not anything with a modifier in front of it. We just need justice.

And it's not hard to watch the news or to see news reports and to see that justice, our view of justice in our own nation, has gone perverted. It has turned upside down.

That people can be guilty of heinous crimes and just let back out on the street without any real sense of what true justice is. We don't care about the victims.

[ 46 : 22 ] We care about the people who perpetrated the crime. And because they're of a particular identity group, that means that we have to let them back out on the street again in order to perpetrate their criminal actions all the more.

It's not that we stop promoting justice, but that we stop deceiving ourselves into thinking that we're going to somehow bring about justice ourselves. We can't.

Not that we give up trying. We ought to be working towards true justice. We ought to be voting towards those who would promote real justice.

Not a perverse sense of justice, but true justice. But we ought not to be deceived as well to think that we can bring about justice apart from the return of our Lord.

It is the second coming of Jesus that will bring about true justice. We will know what justice looks like when Jesus is on the throne.

[ 47 : 31 ] Not until then. We're just not going to see it. in our lifetimes if the Lord tarries.

Here's another application, I think, from this. Why is it that we speak of a poor self-image as a curse and a good self-image as a blessing when Jesus spoke in just the opposite way?

Boy, even when I was younger, it was becoming in vogue to talk about how we need to have a positive self-image. Kind of like the Pharisee who thought he was really good.

No, that's not how Jesus talks about us. That's not how the scriptures talk about us. even in the song Amazing Grace, Amazing Grace.

I once was lost but now I'm found. How does it go? I was blind but now I see. What's the second verse? Saved a what like me?

[ 48 : 50 ] A wretch like me? I think the song goes on to talk about being a worm, for such a worm as I. I think maybe that's a different hymn.

Is it a different hymn? Okay. Forgive me for now understand that as a believer a proper self-image is to view myself the way God views me.

How does God view me? It's created in his image. Someone that he loves incredibly in ways I can't even express with words.

He sent his son to die for me. That's how much he thinks of me. That he calls me his own. I'm his child. That I'm worth saving.

So you might say, well, Rich, that's kind of sounding like a positive self-image. Well, it's not a positive self-image. It is a positive God image.

[ 50 : 18 ] God is not good. It's not that we should be thinking about how we think of ourselves. It's that we need to train ourselves and we need to train our children to think of us as God thinks of us.

How God values us. How God loves us. That's what matters. What I think of myself is not good.

And what I need to rewire my brain, Romans 12, 2, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. I need to rewire what I think about how God thinks of me.

How God views me. Not my own view of me. Last one we'll look at.

There's no sacred, quote unquote sacred activities like going to the temple to pray, which are exempt from sinful motives and actions.

[ 51 : 29 ] Just because you see somebody participating in religious activity does not make them right with God. But let me take that a step further and I think it's the necessary step that needs to be taken here.

Just because I participate in religious activities does not mean that my motives and my heart are pure at all.

I go to church, I spend time in prayer, I read my Bible. I could be doing those out of self-interest, out of making myself feel better about myself, out of making myself look better to other people.

Look at me, I go to church. Matter of fact, I go to Crossroads Church. Oh! Oh! Oh! I don't know if that's any extra special spiritual or not.

But this idea that I can deceive myself into thinking that I'm participating in religious activities, that I'm exempt from questioning my motives, or my heart.

[ 52 : 51 ] Am I pure in the way that I'm thinking about this? Am I doing this because I must? It's the law. Am I doing this because so-and-so will be impressed?

And I don't necessarily think of it directly one-to-one in that way, but I'm concerned about how other people view me. After all, I've got a reputation to uphold, right?

I mean, if you put yourself in my shoes, I'm a pastor. I have to look good, right? I have to look religious.

I have to sound religious. Sometimes I get around folks and I purposefully don't sound religious or don't sound like I'm, and I do it on purpose.

Just to, I was meeting with a group of pastors this week and I was like, man, I have a tough time sometimes coming to church. Because I'm not a people person.

[ 53 : 53 ] And I was like, oh, that's not my impression of you. Well, it's true. I have to, I have to get myself up to come and engage with people because I'm not a people person.

You might look at me and think, well, yeah, that rich, I mean, he gets up in front of people and he's a people person. I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm not. I have to, I have to, I use this time to walk between my house and here to the Lord, please help me.

I need your help because I'm going to be engaging with people. And I struggle with that. I would be content and it's not good. I would be content to live my life alone. Anybody else identify with that?

I could be just alone by myself and be just, just fine. Thank you very much. and, and, and, and, and, and he was, well, I'm not, I won't tell anybody.

It's like, I, I say, I say to my people, I said the first time I've said this, I'm not going to hide who I am. I'm not going to have some sort of image of, well, a pastor has to be this or a pastor has to be that.

[ 54 : 56 ] No, sir. And I'll tell you the things that I struggle with because I don't want to play this game. I don't want to play the game of religion. It is a dirty, dirty game.

I don't want to start going down that road and start thinking like this Pharisee. So Lord, protect me from that. Help me not give into the rut of what Christianity, the daily Christian grind can become a rut, just something of going through the motions.

That's religion. I don't want that. I reject that. And it's so easy for me to fall back into that, into that mindset. that my guess is it's easy for all of us to fall back into just making it religion.

So let's pray that, that, that God keep us from that. God keep us with a heart of saying, Lord, I'm not worthy. I need your mercy.

I need to be, I need to declare my dependence on you over and over and over again because I can't do it myself. I can't, I can't. Let's pray.

[ 56 : 04 ] Lord, thank you so much for your goodness and your mercy, for your grace. And we need it.

And no doubt there are people here or watching online who need your grace and mercy in terms of their standing before you, in terms of knowing that you're, you are their savior.

That they're trusting in you and what you've done and not in themselves. I pray that they would see their need of, of you as a savior, as their savior.

It's the only savior. And that they would trust you. Lord, I'm a sinner. Beat my chest.

mourn over my sin. I am not worthy. Lord, I pray for believers here today, maybe even for those who have been believers for quite a long time, that we would still on a daily basis recognize, Lord, I need you.

[ 57 : 24 ] I can't make it this day without you. I have tried. There have been days in my life, there have been weeks, there have been months, and yes, even years that I have gone where I thought, I'm doing okay.

Yes, I'm saved, but Lord, you can take your attention elsewhere because I've got this. love. And we might not say those words, but with our actions and with our mindset, kind of what we live out.

But Lord, protect us from that. Break us if that's what we need. Bring us to the point of, again, just a humble recognition of, Lord, I am not worthy.

And yes, Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior, but it is all of Christ and none of me, none.

Don't ever let me slip into thinking that I'm doing okay on my own, that I can handle this on my own.

[ 58 : 51 ] Lord, I pray that we would forsake the easy temptation of religion, of falling back into the trap of just going through the motions, of just making it happen in our own strength.

help us to daily recognize our desperate need for you. Lord, we love you.

We praise you. We ask all of this now in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.