

The Good God - Part 1

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: 25 October 2015

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 0 0] my head that says, why am I being told this? And perhaps you've been in the same situation, you're having a conversation with someone, and your mind is able to do two things at once, it's able to listen to what they're saying, but at the same time you're asking the question, why am I being told this? Or you may be sat there this evening thinking, that very thing right now. Why am I being told this? And the reason that I say it is, fairly straightforward, is because here in Luke, Jesus gives an explanation of a parable, but before he gives the explanation of the parable of the Pharisee, who's a religious man, and the tax collector is a man who is another way of saying who has a bad reputation.

So another way of saying what's the definition of a religious man, you would say a Pharisee. What's the definition of a man with a bad reputation, you would say a tax collector. And they seem to go together in those kind of ways. But what Jesus does here is that before he gives us the reason for telling the parable that he tells us, he wants us to stop and notice something in particular. And that is, he's not talking about anybody. He's actually talking to people.

He's not talking about religious people. He's not talking about Pharisees. He's not talking about people who trust in themselves. You'll notice the very first thing that Jesus actually says in verse 9 is that he's speaking to those people.

So as we listen to Jesus this evening, we might want to stop and ask ourselves the question, why am I being told what I'm being told? Jesus isn't speaking about something or about someone.

He's speaking to someone, and that person is defined as someone who trusts in themselves, that they're right, that is, that they're right with God. And they may just treat others with contempt. So Jesus isn't talking about anybody, but he's talking to people, those type of people.

[2 : 1 8] So why am I being told what I'm being told? Why has God given me a Bible where all of his words are written down for me to read? Why does God want me to hear what he's actually said?

Why am I being told this when I could be perhaps told other things? And I think it's a question that we might just need to stop and ask ourselves. Now, I don't think on the day of judgment, though I could be wrong, that we're actually going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and God is going to say, well, I did tell you.

But God did tell us. That's the point. I don't think God will say that. I could be wrong. But God does speak to people. And Jesus is speaking to these people as he speaks this parable.

He's not speaking a parable and people are just listening in. He's speaking the parable to people as in the form of a conversation, as communication. I'm speaking to you. Listen to what I'm saying.

So why are we being told the things that we're being told? Here we've got a big Bible. We've got lots of words in it. Why are you being told the things that you're being told? Well, here are a few. Firstly, Jesus wants you to know, wants me to know, wants everybody else to know, that the only way a person can become right with God is by trusting in him. Jesus wants you to know how to become right with God. Now, it doesn't have so much to do with the condition that you come in. That is the condition of your life. You could be a person that has a rotten life and you know it. Not a good background, not a good sort of list of things in your past that you can sort of hold up to God and be proud of. But then coming to God, that really isn't included when you come to God. Those type of things just don't matter.

[4 : 29] It has more to do with how you leave God once you've met him. You can come to God, however, like the Pharisee, you know, who exalts himself. He doesn't humble himself and then is sent away in many ways with his tail between his legs. Off you go. Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled by God and sent away. And that's exactly the way Jesus finishes the parable. In fact, if you think that the tax collector had to repent of his badness, if they're the things that he has to say sorry to God for, then the religious person is a person who has to come before God and repent of his goodness. And we don't get to see that, do we?

Because we tend to believe that the people that God is approving of are good people. And yet what we see here is that the good person who comes before God and give thanks to God for all of his goodness is actually the one who is sent home not right with God. It's the other man who ends up being sent home right with God. And so I think one of the most surprising things here in this whole passage is the fact that the man who is sent home not right with God is actually the one who gives thanks to God for being the way that he is. I don't know if you find that strange, but I find that really quite strange.

He says, the Pharisee says, thank you God that I am the way that I am. He gives total thanks to God, total credit to God that he's not like other people. He thanks God that he's not a liar like others.

He doesn't give himself the credit. He gives the credit to God. He says, thank you God, I'm not thieves like other people. He doesn't give himself the credit. He gives the credit to God. All credit goes to God. And yet Jesus says that this is the man that actually goes home not right with God.

And we're sat here thinking, well, just how can that be the case? The Pharisee doesn't seem to take any credit for himself. He says, he's not like other people. He's not like other people who are immoral.

[7 : 03] And yet this is the man who goes home not right with God. Why does he do it? Well, as we will see, it is because he's trusting in himself, even trusting in his own goodness. So the parable begins, two men went up to pray, but only one goes back home right with God. And it's not the man you think it's going to be. It's not the Pharisee who has a list of good things. It is actually the man who doesn't have a list of any good things. In fact, he doesn't have a list at all. But the Pharisee begins thanking God for his life not being like other men. He thanks God that he's not an immoral man by contrast. He thanks God. He gives thanks to God. He gives total credit to God that the reason why he is the way that he is, is because of God. And Jesus in this parable says, this man goes home not right with God. And it's normally at this point, as you look out onto a congregation, you can see whether or not the congregation have actually got the point that Jesus is making.

Lest you're sat there thinking, or you go home thinking this evening, thank you God, I'm not like the Pharisee. Thank you God, I'm not like the Pharisee who prays, who fasts, who gives tithes, who's not immoral. Thank you God, I'm not like him. Thank you God, I'm not like him who makes comparisons with other people. Well, it is a challenge, isn't it? Because the clear difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector is that is exactly what the Pharisee does. And you are not allowed to go home this evening after the message thanking God you're not like him. You would have got the point of the message if you did. But let's just stop and note that the man who thanks God, that he's not a liar or a thief like other immoral men, gives total credit to God for him being the way that he is. And yet this is the man who goes home not right with God. The Pharisee comes before

God, he comes standing by himself and he prays, head up it would appear. Whereas the tax collector comes along, he stands at a distance and we're told that he doesn't even look up. It gives us the impression that I guess his head is hung very heavy. You know what it's like when you've done something that you should have done to a person who loves you or who you know loves you and you just can't look him in the eye. There's just that weight that comes upon your whole body. You look down and the tax collector sort of comes before God in that condition and he beats his breast as though he's saying, look, I know how bad I've been. And if I know how bad I've been, then how much more will God who knows everything know what I'm like? He can't even lift his head and he beats his breast and he simply cries out to God for mercy. If I know what I'm like, then what must God think of me?

So he says, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And this is the man we're told is the man that goes home right with God. Two men go up to pray. One man goes home right with God. It's this man, but why?

Why is it not the man who thanks God for his life being good? Why is it not that man? Why is it this tax collector? Well, as I've said, it's not really the condition of your life as you come to God that matters all that much. You can come to God in any condition that you find yourself. It's really about the condition that you leave yourself that matters or rather that you leave God. You've met God and then what condition do you leave? Do you leave as one who trusts God, that God can make you right with him? Or do you leave God not believing that, not trusting in that? Well, the Pharisee's goodness is a real goodness. He's not lying. And the Pharisee's goodness is totally down to God. That is why he gives total thanks to God. And it would have gone something like this. A Pharisee is someone who would have been brought up with God's word. And so God's word says something like this. Don't steal. Why not? Because

[11 : 56] God doesn't steal. And so the Pharisee, who would not have known that unless brought to him by God's word, takes it on board and gives thanks to God that the reason he doesn't steal is because God has told him not to. He lives his life in light of God's word and he doesn't steal. And so he gives thanks to God.

I won't steal because you've told me not to and I'm not going to steal. And then God's word says something like, thou shall not lie or don't lie. Why not? Well, because God doesn't lie.

And so this man, because he understands what God is like and God is told him this, he understands that God is speaking to him, then says, well, I'm not going to lie either. And so the reason why he doesn't steal and the reason why he doesn't tell lies is because God has been good to him by revealing to him exactly what God wants. And he thanks God for this, that the reason he's not a liar or a thief is totally down to God. God gets all the credit. Here's a man who's not like other men. He doesn't lie, he doesn't steal. And they're good things. They're not bad things at all.

And yet it's this man who leaves his prayer at the temple and goes home, Jesus says, not actually right with God. But why? Why?

Well, this man is definitely good. He's definitely got a personal goodness, but his goodness is only in comparison to those who don't believe. I'm better than the tax collector. And that's an easy comparison to make because if you've got God in your life, then God is actually going to do something in your life that is not yet happening in an unbeliever's life. So on that scale, you're bound to have good things in your life that an unbeliever doesn't. And so it's an easy comparison to make.

[13 : 57] And so the Pharisee thanks God that God has made all this difference in his life, but he only sees it in comparison to other people. He doesn't see it in comparison to God.

But the tax collector, on the other hand, stands before God with whatever kind of life that he has and asks God to be merciful. And he goes home right with God while the tax collector doesn't.

You see, the trouble with the tax collector is that he began to trust in the fact that he was a good person. He began to trust in the fact that he was a better person because of God. He began to trust in the fact that he was a good person because of God. And because he trusted in that, he went home not right with God. And perhaps you're sat there thinking, you know, I've given thanks to God my whole life for the good things that I've got. How can he turn me away when I get to heaven? Perhaps you're sat there thinking that. Perhaps you are the Pharisee, where you do give thanks to God for everything that you've received and had. And yet we're told that that's exactly what the Pharisee does and yet is sent home, not right with God. Maybe you're sat there thinking, I just don't understand how that can be right. I don't understand how the Pharisee can give thanks to God for being the way that he is and still goes home, not right with God. I just can't seem to get that through my head. Well, I'm going to put it another way for you. Let me do this for you. Your life is better because of God and you give thanks to God for it and that is a good thing. And your life is better and you realize that your life is not like other people. You're not immoral like other people. Perhaps you were, but you're not any longer.

But here's the question. Are you justified? Are you right with God because you're better now? Are you right with God because you're good and not immoral? Is that actually what makes you right with God? Now, if you think so, this is why you really have to listen to Jesus, because this is why Jesus isn't speaking about people like this. He's speaking to people like this.

Jesus. The Pharisee went home, not justified. It was the tax collector who went home, being right with God. But why? Well, the first thing to notice is that the tax collector doesn't compare himself to anybody else. He just stands before God, completely before God, and he might just think, well, what if there is no one worse than me? What if I am the worst of the worst? And that's why he doesn't compare himself with any other people. In other words, he doesn't compare himself in the way that, you know, I'm better than that person. What if the only comparison he does make is, I'm the worst of the worst, or he doesn't make any comparison at all. He just knows that he's not right before God, and that's why he cries out for mercy. You see, the Pharisee sees himself before the tax collector, but the tax collector only sees himself before God. That's one of the key differences between the two. The Pharisee doesn't see himself before God. He gives God the thanks and the praise and the credit, but he sees himself before other people. The tax collector, on the other hand, doesn't see himself before other people. He does, however, see himself before God and realizes that in order to come before God, he's going to need God's goodness. He's going to need God's mercy to come down on his life.

[17 : 52] And so he prays, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. In other words, he's asking God not to treat him as a person who has offended him. He's asking God for the kind of mercy to treat him as a person who has never offended God in thought, in word, or deed. He's asking to be treated as someone who is perfect. God, be merciful to me, a sinner, is another way of saying, treat me as someone who has never offended you. Even though he has offended God, hence why he's crying out for mercy. And what we begin to see is, here is a man who's clearly not trusting in his own goodness, but here is a man who's clearly trusting in the goodness of God. That God is good enough to be merciful to him, a sinner. He's expressing trust in the goodness of God and not in his own goodness. That God will actually be good to him in this way. God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And we're told that Jesus says, this man, after his prayer, goes home right with God. Why? Because God is granted the mercy. God has given him that mercy. God has made him right with himself. But how could God do that? Well, remember who's telling the parable.

Jesus is the one who's telling the parable, and he's speaking to those who trust in themselves and who compare themselves with other people. That's the reason why Jesus is telling the parable, and Jesus is speaking to those type of people as he's telling the parable. Or to put it another way, why is Jesus saying this to me? Why am I being told what I'm being told from the mouth of Jesus?

Why am I being told this? Jesus isn't speaking about something, he's speaking to me. So why am I being told what I'm being told?

Well, Jesus wants to make the point that you are not to trust in yourselves, but that you are only to trust in him alone to be right with God.

The reason why Jesus speaks to you is Jesus is getting your attention not to trust in yourself, even if you do give thanks to God for the good things in your life.

[20 : 54] As a basis of, well, I've given thanks to God for all these good things, and therefore how can God turn me away? He's trying to call you away from that to total trust in him, to be right with God. In other words, Jesus is God's way of being merciful.

Jesus is actually God's mercy. How do I experience the mercy of God? Well, I come to Jesus Christ.

And so the tax collector here is a man who ends up being treated as one who's not actually offended God, not because he hadn't offended God, but because Jesus takes his life and swaps it literally for the tax collectors. That's what mercy is. That Jesus is saying is that as you trust me, that as you believe in me, that as you trust in me is the goodness of God, then what is actually happening at that point is that you are being treated by God as one who has never offended him. And Jesus, as we know, is on the way to the cross to be treated as one who has offended God on our behalf. God, be merciful to me, a sinner. It's Jesus' life for your life. It's Jesus' death for your death. And in his resurrection, we have new life, so that we cannot trust in ourselves, but trust in him completely. Trust in his goodness, and not trust in our own goodness, even if we can give thanks to God for that goodness.

Okay, let me say that again. To trust in his goodness and not our own, even if we can give thanks to God for all the good things in our life. See, the Pharisee clearly gives thanks to God for all the good things in his life. But the tax collector asks for mercy, trusting not in his own goodness, but in the goodness of God, apart from any good or bad things in his life. And this is why he goes home right with God. And this is why the Pharisee doesn't. I've got a relative who thanks God for the life that they've had. They're not a believer. But it's said, often a time around the kitchen table over a cup of tea. God's been good to me. And gives God credit for the things that they find in their life, or they have found in their life over the years. And then trusts in their thanking God as their entrance into heaven. That they think that because they've got to the position where they thank God for the good things that God has done in their life, that that is the reason why God will not turn them away and will allow them into the new heavens and the new earth. But as we see, the Pharisee here, thanks God, but doesn't go home justified and right with God. Why? Because he's just like that person. He's trusting in the wrong things. He's trusting in the fact that he can turn to God and give thanks to God for all the good things that he now enjoys in his life. He's not actually trusting in Jesus. He's not actually trusting in God. He's trusting in the fact that God has made him a better person. This may be new to you, but that is not the gospel.

The gospel is, be merciful to me, a sinner. That God gets us right with himself through mercy, and that mercy is Jesus Christ. A person can never, ever get right with God by trusting in the goodness that God has produced in their life. Never, not once, ever. A person can only ever be right with God by trusting in the good God himself, in God's mercy, in God's goodness. In other words, by trusting in Jesus. It's not about how good we are compared to other people. It's not about how good we are now that we're saved. We don't trust in the fact that my life is better now than what it was, and therefore, God must let me in. I don't get into heaven because I'm a better person now because of God than what I was 10 years ago or 20 years ago. I get to be in God's presence solely on the basis of Jesus Christ and nothing else. That's why God is good. And so the Pharisee goes home not justified because he's not trusting in that. He's trusting in the fact that he gives thanks to God, his own goodness. Whereas the tax collector doesn't give thanks to God. He simply cries out for mercy, trusting in the fact that God can do for him something that he cannot do for himself, that Jesus could be his righteousness or would be his righteousness, that God would be his goodness.

[26 : 22] Now, it is true that if you're a Christian, you will be better now than what you were before you were saved because God is working in your life. He is about making you better. He is about making you the person you ought to be, the person that he wants you to be. But that's not what makes you right with him. What makes you right with him is Jesus. The tax collector knows this.

The tax collector is a man who doesn't want to be treated as a person who has ever offended God. He actually wants to be treated as a person who has never offended God. In other words, what he's actually saying is, God, treat me as you would treat your own son. And God gave his son.

And treated his son like all of us who offended him. Treated his son as he would treat those who offended him.

So being saved isn't about recognizing you've got good things in your life and that you can give thanks to God for all those good things. Being right with God is solely on the basis of giving thanks to the good God for Jesus. You're only to trust in Jesus.

Jesus is your righteousness. Jesus is your justification. Jesus is your goodness. That's what you trust in. Not the good things, even if those good things come from God.

[28 : 05] The only thing that we are called to trust in is not ourselves, but in the good God. In Jesus who is our justification, our righteousness, our goodness. Jesus is speaking to those who trust in themselves so that they would no longer trust in themselves. He's speaking to those stating that he can do for them what they could never do and be for them what they could never be before God.

So that we do not trust ourselves, but we trust him. A good God, full of mercy, who makes us right with himself, apart from anything that we do. Amen.