

Sunday, July 14, 2024 | The Road to Redemption

Week 32 | Luke 18:9-17 | "Sola Fide"

Last week, we continued studying the end times. Instead of discussing the specifics of the end of the world, we talked about what we should do while waiting for Jesus' return. To put it simply, we should pray. To illustrate this point, the Lord told a parable about a persistent widow and an unjust judge in which the woman got what she wanted because she kept coming to the judge; she didn't quit. Likewise, we ought to pray continually, looking for Jesus' return. Otherwise, we'll lose heart. **Routine prayer keeps despair at bay.**

"Teacher's pet" refers to someone who fawns over their instructor, hoping to earn special treatment. They're the sort of person who might remind a teacher that they forgot to collect the homework, or they'll give lavish gifts on 'Teacher Appreciation Day,' or they'll tattle on someone for breaking the rules. And while it is good to turn in assignments, to show gratitude, and to abide by the do's and don'ts of the classroom, the teacher's pet does not care for *virtue* but for *status*. They do not do what they do for the sake of doing something good but for *themselves*.

The Pharisees were the first-century version of the teacher's pet. They lived a rigidly moral life, but it was not for the sake of doing what was right; it was so that they might justify themselves (cf. Lu. 16:15). So consumed by their good works, they would even take God's commands and add additional requirement on top of them, thinking this made them *exceptionally righteous!* But all this accomplished was that it made them *incredibly proud*. In their eyes, anyone who didn't rise to the standards of their *manufactured* holiness deserved ridicule, alienation, and even dismissal.

But as today's passage will show, if our good works were a prerequisite for God's approval, all of us would be hopelessly lost, *even the teacher's pet* (cf. Matt. 5:20). Left to ourselves, we cannot save ourselves. It would be like a drowning man trying to save himself, knowing he can't swim. *Our only hope is God's grace*, or, in the words of the great reformers, "*sola fide*"—i.e., faith alone. Only those who put their faith in what the Lord has done *for them* (not what they could do for themselves) will be *justified*.

I want you to notice **two** things:

- i. **The self-esteem of the Pharisee.**

READ: Luke 18:9-12 (ESV)

⁹ He also told this **parable** to some who **trusted in themselves** that they were righteous, and **treated others with contempt**:

¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

Admittedly, we do not like this fellow. However, we must concede that his claims are praiseworthy.

It is a good thing **not** to be an “**extortioner**,” “**unjust**,” or an “**adulterer**.” In fact, to say that he was **not** a “**tax collector**” would’ve been a good thing, considering such people were the arm of their Roman overloads. **As will become apparent in the story of Zacchaeus**, tax collectors regularly blackmailed their own people for profit.

Furthermore, while the Law demanded that everyone fast **once** a year on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16:29), this Pharisee fasted twice a week! That’s 28.4% of the year! Would any of us claim to have such control?

Not only did he fast twice a week, but he also gave “**tithes of all that**” that he received. Tithing was a crucial part of Judaism and, according to Deut. 14:22, Jews were to tithe their “**grain**,” “**wine**,” “**oil**,” and the firstborn of their “**herd and flock**.” But the Pharisee’s phrasing means he tithed on **everything**. Given Jesus’ comments in Matthew 22:23, they gave a tenth of spices like “**mint, dill, and cumin**.”

However, the issue here is not that the Pharisee wasn’t living an exemplary life but that he allowed his good deeds to go to his head. He became puffed up and proud, thinking he was better than the “**tax collector**” because he lived a more righteous life. He felt his good works justified him before God. But as we’ll see, **self-righteousness** invites **condemnation** from God. Good works do not negate bad works or absolve a bad person.

ii. **The self-abasement** of the tax collector.

READ: Luke 18:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ 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!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house **justified**, rather than the other. For everyone who **exalts** himself will be **humbled**, but the one who **humbles** himself will be **exalted**.”

The Greek term translated as "merciful" is better translated as "make atonement" since it always refers to the propitiation in a sacrifice. In fact, the only other use of it is in Hebrews 2:17, where it describes Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross.

So, what's the takeaway?

READ: Luke 18:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵ Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. ¹⁶ But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁷ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

We must come to Jesus like children—i.e., helpless, defenseless, and useless—or else we cannot come to him at all.

When Jesus says we must "receive the kingdom of God like a child," he does not glorify childhood. Unlike today, children were not idealized in the ancient world. In the first century, children, along with women and slaves, were disregarded and resigned to the fringes of society.¹ We rightly condemn the disciple's actions, but their behavior wouldn't only have been *approved* of in their day, but it would've been *expected*.

So, when Jesus says come to him "like a child" do not romanticized his words. When he says this, he wants us to come to him helpless, defenseless, and useless. We must see ourselves as those who have **no** standing, vote, or voice. We must come like children, babies, in fact, who cannot even come into his presence unaided but must be carried into his presence. And like the tax collector and children, we mustn't come with our works, but we must come to Jesus saying only this: "Be merciful to me a sinner."

¹ Edwards, p. 507, "One will search ancient literature in vain for sympathy toward the young comparable to that shown them by Jesus."

Video Description:

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SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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