



Two Churchgoers: The Right & Wrong Way of Approaching God

Considering a Message from Luke 18:9-14

For the Week of August 12th, 2018

This Sunday of the church year focuses on the importance of coming before God humbly, with repentant hearts, willing to confess our sins, seeking God's mercy. Such hearts give glory and praise to God this kind of heart in us, shows that we revere and trust in Him! This is the kind of heart demonstrated by the Tax Collector. Unlike the Pharisee who "trusted in his own righteousness and looked down on others," the Tax Collector admitted that he was unrighteous, that he could look down upon no one else! Instead, he asked God to "be merciful to him, a sinner!"

This is how we approach God as we gather in His house—as we come to church, gathering around the Means of Grace. We do so with repentant hearts, seeking to receive God's forgiveness and mercy. Never would we hold up our own righteous acts or make comparisons between ourselves and "others." The only standard we can compare ourselves to is the standard of perfection that God has set in His Law. We understand and admit that we have fallen short of this standard. Therefore we are driven to seek God's forgiveness, which He is happy to share with us because of what our Lord Jesus has done! By Jesus' life, death, and resurrection we now can leave church as the Tax Collector did—Justified before God! As we look at the two churchgoers, we see the right and wrong way of approaching God. We do not want to follow the example of the Pharisee who tried to point God to see his own righteousness. Rather we follow the Tax Collector's example: being willing to admit our faults and trusting in God's mercy.

Opening Prayer: We thank You Heavenly Father for bringing us together. Send Your Holy Spirit to help us grow in faith and love, especially as we gather together with our fellow Christians. Help us to have humble hearts that trust in Your mercy and grace—and that rejoice in knowing that You are willing to justify broken, sinful people like us. Help us always to love and rejoice in the message of Your grace. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

CONNECT to Each Other

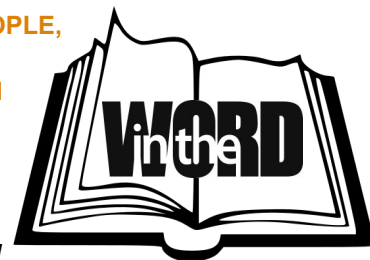
Take a few moments to greet each other—especially anyone who might be new or unfamiliar to the people in your group. Introduce yourselves again if anyone is unfamiliar with anyone else, give an interesting factoid about yourself that not many people know...

1. The parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector is a familiar one to us. We hear it often. What other Bible lessons do you never tire of hearing? Which ones never get old or stale for you—but you are happy to stand before them again and again? Please also explain why you love these sections so much... **ANSWERS WILL VARY/SUBJECTIVE—CERTAINLY THERE ARE MANY RICH SECTIONS OF SCRIPTURE THAT WE CAN RETURN TO AGAIN AND AGAIN AND THEY NEVER GET OLD... LIKE A BEAUTIFUL JEWEL OR A MASTERPIECE PAINTING THAT WE LOVE TO SEE AGAIN AND AGAIN, WE CAN FIND AND APPRECIATE NEW DETAILS IN THEM—THEY REFRESH US AS WE APPLY THEIR UNCHANGING TRUTHS TO OUR CONSTANTLY CHANGING LIVES AND SITUATIONS. PLUS, THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS PROMISED TO WORK THROUGH HIS WORD IN OUR HEARTS REGARDLESS OF HOW MANY TIMES WE HAVE HEARD THAT CERTAIN SECTION OF THE WORD! REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE ILLUSTRATION OF THE FARMER & HIS SAME OLD FIELD THAT HE RETURNS TO AGAIN AND AGAIN...**

CONNECT to the Word—Read the Bible text together (also consider its context): **Luke 18:9-14**

2. What do you know about Pharisees? How would you characterize a Pharisee? Why did Jesus have to deal so harshly with the Pharisees? **PHARISEES WORKED HARD TO BE DEVOUT! THIS IS NOT BAD! EVEN THE RULES AND REGULATIONS THEY MADE TO HELP THEM STAY IN LINE WITH THE COMMANDMENTS—THESE WERE DEVELOPED AFTER THE ISRAELITES RETURNED FROM THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY! THEY DIDN'T WANT TO EVER EXPERIENCE SOMETHING LIKE THAT AGAIN...BUT THEY WENT TOO FAR THE OPPOSITE WAY SO THAT THE PHARISEES BECAME KNOWN AS OUR TEXT EXPLAINS: "TRUSTING IN THEMSELVES (THEIR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS) AND LOOKING DOWN ON OTHERS." SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS LEAVES NO ROOM FOR CHRIST AND HIS FORGIVENESS!**
3. How do we relate to the Pharisee in our text? What are the temptations he fell to that still afflict us today? **MANY STILL BELIEVE THAT THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS ABOUT "BEING GOOD!" FOLLOWING RULES**

AND LAWS—“BEING A GOOD PERSON!” WE SHOULD DESIRE TO BE GOOD PEOPLE, BUT MUST RECOGNIZE THAT BEING GOOD DOES NOT MAKE US CHRISTIANS—TRUSTING IN GOD’S MERCY DOES! PEOPLE STILL STRUGGLE BY TRUSTING IN THEIR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS—BY COMPARING THEMSELVES TO OTHER PEOPLE WHO MIGHT LACK RIGHTEOUSNESS!



4. *(Please share as you are willing...)* In what ways do you personally struggle with “Pharisaical” temptations? *(i.e. trusting in your own good works, or various comparisons that you make between yourself and others...)* **ANSWERS WILL VARY/SUBJECTIVE—SEE FROM THE SERMON, THE LIST OF COMPARISONS THAT WE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO MAKE.. DON’T WE ALL STRUGGLE WITH THE TEMPTATION TO COMPARE OURSELVES WITH OTHERS!?**
5. What do you know about Tax Collectors in Jesus’ time? How would you characterize a tax collector? Why was Jesus willing to associate with people like Tax Collectors? **THEY WERE CORRUPT CROOKS! THEY TYPICALLY COLLECTED MORE THAN THEY HAD TO, THEN KEPT THE EXCESS FOR THEMSELVES. THEY WERE CONSIDERED TRAITORS AMONG THE JEWS—IN LEAGUE WITH THE OPPRESSIVE ROMAN GOVERNMENT! THEY WERE ROTTEN INDIVIDUALS—YET JESUS WAS WILLING TO MINISTER TO THEM—HE FOUND THEM RECOGNIZING THEIR EMPTY WAYS OF LIFE, DESIRING FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION. “IT IS NOT THE HEALTHY WHO NEED A DOCTOR!” LUKE 5:31... LOOKUP AND CONSIDER JESUS’ DISCIPLE MATTHEW (MATTHEW 9:9-13) ALSO THE ACCOUNT OF ZACCHAEUS (LUKE 19:1-10). JESUS DESIRES TO SHOW MERCY EVEN TO DESPICABLE SINNERS...**
6. In what ways should we be like the Tax Collector from the Parable? **WILLING TO ADMIT OUR FAULTS—APPROACH GOD HUMBLY, DESIRING HIS MERCY AND GRACE! CONFESS OUR SINS, GO HOME JUSTIFIED!**

CONNECT to Life

7. Where/How in our church service (and also in our daily lives,) do we approach God with the kind of heart that the Tax Collector had? Where/How does God exalt those who come humbly before Him? **ESPECIALLY IN THE SERVICES OF GOD’S HOUSE—IN CHURCH—THIS IS WHERE GOD COMES TO US WANTING TO DELIVER TO US HIS MERCY & FORGIVENESS! OUR SERVICES WHICH FOCUS ON GOD’S FORGIVENESS THAT IS SHARED WITH US IN WORD AND SACRAMENT ARE DESIGNED TO ASSURE US AND FOCUS US ON GOD’S ANNOUNCEMENT OF FORGIVENESS AND PEACE—CHURCH’S PRIMARY TASK IS TO SHARE WITH THOSE WHO CONFESS THEIR SINS THE ABSOLUTION—ANNOUNCING GOD’S FORGIVENESS. WE CAN HAVE THIS EVERYDAY AS WE OPEN HIS WORD, HAVE DEVOTIONS, AND RECALL OUR BAPTISMS AND GOD’S PROMISES GIVEN TO US IN THEM!**
8. How did the hymns, other lessons, parts of the service, etc. fit together with the Sermon message and overall theme for the day? **VARIOUS ANSWERS—OBVIOUSLY THE WHOLE SERVICE IS DESIGNED TO BE A COHESIVE UNIT/SINGLE THEME.**

CONNECT in Prayer—*In closing & throughout the week!*

- PLEASE OFFER PRAYERS for continued appreciation of God’s mercy and a willingness for us all to come before God with humble hearts that rejoice to know we get to go home Justified before Him!
- Pray for the continued success of our outreach efforts—especially to bless the Gospel Seeds that our area ELS/WELS churches are working to plant with our Sudanese friends. Pray that our picnic potluck this past Sunday might build bridges and provide us with opportunities to share God’s word with this community!
- Prayers for God’s guidance and blessings on our upcoming building project that is moving ahead.
- Prayers for our upcoming school year—and continued opportunities for Mt. Olive, MVL, & BLC to grow and to build young people up in their faith and trust of God’s grace.
- Continued Prayers for healing and strengthening of Dr. Steve Reagles, Sig Lee, Ernie Lillo, Gail Blilie, and Joan Navia!
- Offer any other prayers for those in your group who have any requests.

