

Disciples Don't Judge

October 27, 2019

Scripture: Luke 18: 9-14

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

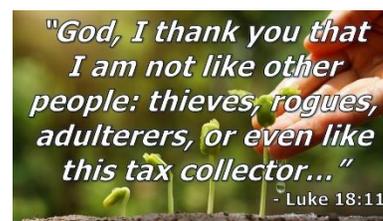


Reading the parable that Jesus teaches today affects me in one of two ways. In that sense, it is like the parable of the sheep and the goats that we find in Matthew 25.

If you recall, both the sheep and the goats fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and so on. But the goats did so out of obligation or duty. The sheep served out of love for Christ. Sometimes I have been the hands and feet of Jesus and I feel like a sheep. At other times I have served grudgingly or have even outright ignored the voice of the Holy Spirit. I am frequently reminded of the fact that I am at times a lot like the goats – failing to feed the hungry or to visit the imprisoned. When I read or am reminded of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, this passage has the same affect. I play both the role of the condemning, judgmental Pharisee at different points in my life and at other points I am the humble and contrite tax collector, recognizing my sinful nature

and my need for a loving and forgiving God. I think we can all relate to both characters. I believe we all wrestle with who we are and who we will be, just like Jacob did in last week's scripture and message. With that in mind, let us pray...

We begin this morning with ourselves – sorry, I mean with the Pharisee. If you are not there yet, please turn in your Bible or in a pew Bible to Luke 18. Thank you. In verse eleven, hear again the beginning of the prayer of the religious leader:



"God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector". The Pharisee is first judgmental. In Jesus' words, the Pharisee *"regarded others with contempt"*. He looked down his critical nose and pointed his holier-than-thou finger at others often. I can easily see that finger pointed over at the tax collector standing in the corner as he too prays to God. I can easily envision this because I have done this. Maybe I did not physically point a finger at others, but I certainly did in my mind. It is so easy to fall into the trap of comparing ourselves to others. Well, at least to compare ourselves to others that we think are clearly below us. That's the game the Pharisee was playing. Look at his list: thieves, rogues, adulterers, and tax collectors. It is the game we play too.

You see, when I play the game, I do not compare myself to Adam Hamilton or to Dr. David Jeremiah. Oh no. I compare myself to that guy who was late for the meeting or to the gal that failed to visit that person who was ill. It is easy for the Pharisee to compare himself to that tax collector. The tax collector probably did not even know what fasting was, never mind practicing it. Same for giving

his tithe to the temple. Clearly someone as greedy as a tax collector would not give even a denarius to the temple. He is an easy target for the judgmental Pharisee.

Being honest, I still struggle with being judgmental to this day. I see people making decisions or choices that I would not or do not think that I would make, and I quickly slip into being judgmental and condemning. Usually the Holy Spirit brings fast and sure conviction and I step back from that stinkin' thinkin' and try to understand the situation from their perspective or context. When I have walked another mile in that person's shoes, my tendency is to judge less and to offer compassion and understanding more swiftly.

Perhaps the best illustration of this comes from my struggles and then growth with the homeless population in Rapid City. Before I knew anyone who was homeless or even began to understand the complexity of the issues and circumstances that most homeless people deal with, I would avoid them any way I could. Walking downtown I would look ahead and cross to the other side of the street so that I did not even have to walk by them.

When I did encounter a homeless person, I would cut off the conversation as quickly as possible, walking away thinking thoughts like, "Get a job" or "Make a better choice with your life". Looking back, I was so ignorant and arrogant, and I was such a hypocrite. I'd read the story of the sheep and the goats in my morning devotional time and I'd feel guilty about my actions and thoughts, but then I kept acting and thinking the same way when I'd encounter the next

homeless person. I even thought the thought of the Pharisee more than once in a while: *"Thank God I'm not like..."* When I kept that segment of the population at arm's length, it was easier to ignore them or to condemn them or to judge them. I think this is generally true with all of us. When we stereotype or lump all of a certain group of people together and add in all those negative traits or assumptions, then it is easier to judge and to condemn or to simply disregard them because they are clearly unworthy of our time and attention.

That was who and what I was. But then God began to put me in places and situations where I learned more about the conditions and factors and realities that many who find themselves homeless live with and within. I met Joel and Dee. I learned of their unique situation, of the specific things they were dealing with. As I got to know them, they became my friends; they became people I care about. Joel was much like me. Just by a few twists of fate, he was homeless and struggling with life. As I became aware of the fact that I was not too many poor decisions or too many unfortunate turns of fate away from homelessness, I started to see those dealing with issues of poverty and homelessness as people with individual stories. I became very grateful for the systems and relationships around me that added layers of protection and insurance against me being homeless. I participated and then helped in a few "Poverty Simulations" and gained a deeper and more empathetic understanding of the roots and causes of poverty and homelessness. Education was another way that God reshaped me.

From this first relationship and then through education, God stirred in me a compassion and understanding for those dealing with homelessness. As I met and got to know Pat and Gloria and many others through the HOPE Center and other events that I participated in, my arrogance and hypocrisy began to melt away. But God had to work in me and had to prune away those awful things inside of me before I could see these folks as God saw these folks, before I could love them as God loved them. It continues to be a process. As I said last week, we are all a work in progress.



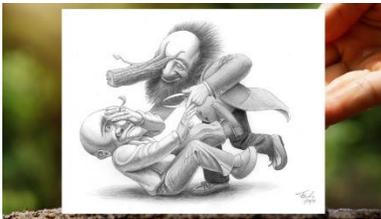
In his teachings throughout the gospels, Jesus is clear that we are not to judge others, that we are to leave judgment to God. Perhaps the best and most direct teaching on this comes in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7. Turn there with me for a moment. In verses one through five Jesus offers these words:

¹ Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. ² For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³ Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

Let's dive into what Jesus is saying here in Luke 7. First, there is a warning. When we judge others, we will be subject to judgment by God. The measuring stick that we hold up to others will be the same stick that God holds up against

us. If we judge in arrogance or condemnation or superiority, like the Pharisee, then God will judge us the same way. I do not know about you, but I do not want God judging me from the far superior place that God occupies. The outcome would not be good. I prefer God's mercy and grace and forgiveness. How about you?

Second, in this passage from Matthew 7, there is a reality check. Jesus reminds us that we cannot possibly see that speck in our neighbor's eye with the log sticking out of our own eye. Too often we want to look past the log and deal with the speck in someone else's eye. I love this cartoon that illustrates this

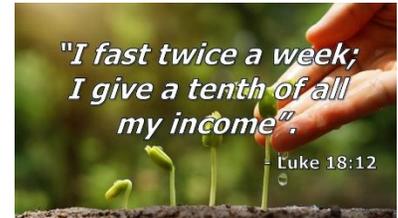


battle that we often try and fight. We want to focus on some little thing in another's person's life rather than deal with the big sins in our own lives. It can become a sadly comical wrestling match. Jesus is admonishing us

to first get our own house in order before we begin to try and help another to get their house in order. To put this into concrete terms it would be like a man having an affair scolding another man for not sending his wife flowers on her birthday.

In our parable, this is what the Pharisee is doing from Jesus' perspective. Jesus is warning him that if God were to judge him as he is judging the tax collector, well, things would not turn out so good. In a similar way, the Pharisee has much sin in his own life to address before really worrying about the tax collector. But the parable is not just about being judgmental. The second characteristic of the toxic religion present in the Pharisee is that of self-righteousness.

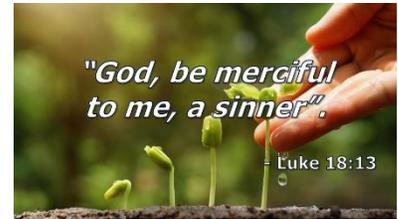
Our passage today is addressed to *"some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous"*. In the Pharisee's own words, we can see that he is certainly confident of his own self-righteousness. Really as a form of bragging, the Pharisee prays out loud, so that all can hear him, *"I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income"*. He is saying, look at me, I am so good. My friends, we also like to point out our own success stories. Facebook and other social media tools are great vehicles for saying to others, "Look how good I am" or "Look at what I did". Scroll through some time if you question this.



In the religious world of today, self-righteousness and being judgmental are surely alive and well. On the larger denominational level, different religions think they have the "pure" or the holier or the correct religion. There is a reason, after all, that there are over 200 major Protestant denominations in the United States alone. And as religious folks, individually we can certainly have an air of superiority about us. When taken all together, polls reveal that many unchurched people avoid church and religious people because of our self-righteousness and the tendency to be judgmental of others. Add hypocrisy to the mix and we can be downright unattractive to those outside our walls.

Lastly, we turn to the tax collector. Despised by many in his day, the tax collector is the ray of sunshine in our passage for today. First, look at his posture. The tax collector stands far off, away from the altar, probably over in the corner. He bows his head low – he will not even look towards heaven. He beats his breast in repentance and maybe in recognition of his unworthiness at even being in God's presence.

The tax collector cries out, *"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"* What a humble admission. What a penitent request. What a recognition of that log in his eye.



As he wraps up the parable, in verse 14 Jesus states, *"I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other"*. To be justified means to be made right

with God. Like the tax collector, we are also made right with God when we confess our sins, repent of our sins, and turn towards God with a sincere and grateful heart. Jesus concludes this same verse with the important reminder, *"All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted"*.

For the Pharisee, the source of his arrogance was his pride. Pride can be the root of much evil. The Pharisee, in his pride, thought he followed all the rules and checked all the boxes. He looked at others who did not measure up and he judged them harshly. There was no grace in the Pharisee. He exalted himself. As we consider the Pharisee and his pride, we too must ask ourselves, where do I have too much pride? Where does pride in your life need to die so that humility can reign? Is your pride in the things you know, in the things you can do, in the things you possess, in the titles that you have gained?

Maybe the better question is this: are you humble? For all of us, both success and elevation in God's kingdom begin with humility. The tax collector, in his honest humility, knew that he did not deserve to stand in God's presence, never mind ask God for forgiveness. He knew he was a sinner. In humility he stood in the corner and begged for God's grace and mercy. When we too search our

hearts and humbly ask for God's compassion, we will experience God's grace and mercy and forgiveness. In asking the question, "Are you humble?", we are reminded again and again to seek humility. These words will keep watch over the door to our heart, mind, and soul, guarding them from pride and judging and hypocrisy. Then, in humility we will be exulted by our God.

If we choose to be like the Pharisee, self-righteous and judgmental, we too will be humbled one day. But if we choose to be like the tax collector, humble and penitent, then we will one day be exalted by God. *"The measure you give will be the measure you get"*. Like the tax collector, may the way we measure ourselves be both honest and humble, using Jesus Christ and his life as our guide. Disciples don't judge. We are called to love and to offer mercy and grace and forgiveness as we seek to live as Jesus' hands and feet in the world. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve:

- 1) Grow. Where do you tend to judge others? How can you better leave this task to God's capable hands?
- 2) Pray. In what areas are you arrogant and self-righteous? Pray for some humility.
- 3) Serve. How can you reach out in love this week to dispel the popular perception that religious folks are judgmental?