

WHAT ARE PARABLES?

- A parable is, literally, something “cast alongside” something else. Jesus’ parables were stories that were “cast alongside” a truth in order to illustrate that truth. His parables were teaching aids.
- They use a common, culturally relevant story to reveal a moral, spiritual, or kingdom truth.
- They reveal the heart of Jesus in practical ways to be lived out.

Luke 18:9-14 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.” ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ¹³But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ¹⁴I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

CONTEXT

- This parable occurs towards the end of Jesus’ ministry.
- As the end draws near for Jesus, He is becoming more confrontational with the religious leaders.
- The Pharisees were part of a social and religious movement. The name literally means “one who is separated.” They separated themselves by how strictly they tried to obey the Laws of Moses.
 - Pharisees thought their own goodness was so impressive that it could not fail to make them acceptable to God.
 - The Pharisee in the story is the epitome of one who is self-justifying. His prayer has no elements of confession or thanksgiving to God. His prayer is all about him.
- Unlike the Pharisee, the tax collector stood “at a distance” perhaps in an outer room, but certainly far from the Pharisee who would have been offended by the nearness of this man.
 - Tax collectors, because of their association with the hated Romans, were seen as traitors to Israel and were loathed and treated as outcasts.
 - This man’s posture shows his unworthiness before God. Unable to even lift his eyes to heaven, the burden of his guilt and shame evident. It causes him to cry out for mercy.

THE TAX COLLECTOR EXHIBITS PRECISELY WHAT JESUS SPOKE ABOUT:

Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

- Being poor in spirit means admitting we have nothing to offer to God to atone for our sin. We come to God as empty, impoverished, despised, bankrupt, pitiable, desperate beggars.
- Because of this attitude, the tax collector is declared justified (made righteous).

JESUS MAKES IT CLEAR THAT WE CANNOT DO ENOUGH THINGS RIGHT TO MAKE UP FOR OUR SIN:

Matthew 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

- The people can’t believe it. The Pharisees are the best rule-followers they know!

JESUS CONCLUDES WITH:

Matthew 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- No one can do that, and Jesus’ audience knows it! That’s the point. No amount of good works, church attendance, tithes, community service, or anything else we do is sufficient to take away our sin and enable us to stand before a holy God on our own.
- The good news is that’s why God sent Jesus to die on the cross. His death is the only “work” that is able to cleanse us and make us acceptable to God.

HUMILITY FOR BELIEVERS

- While this passage is specifically talking to people about the humility that is required to receive salvation, God’s Word has a lot to say about humility as believers.
- Remember, the Pharisees started out with the right intentions but ended up with the wrong perspective. And it’s easy for us to become a Pharisee unintentionally.

- If we are not careful, as we learn more about God and His Word and start walking in obedience, we become frustrated with people who don't live up to what we are doing.
- Frustration can turn to looking down on them. Soon we have can end up with contempt for all who can't keep up with what we put into practice. We become a full-fledged Pharisees.
- Pride is all about comparison. It has to view someone or something as less.

“Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good looking, there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.” - C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*
- Spiritual comparisons are silly. We don't know the full story. All we see is the outside.
- We tend to be incredibly biased. We get “Log-Eye Disease.” (See **Matthew 7:1-5**)
 - ◆ We see everyone else's faults while minimizing our own, and we compare our best against their worst.

UNFORTUNATELY, MOST OF US DON'T SEE PRIDE AS A SERIOUS PROBLEM.

- Satan's fall was because of pride.
- **Proverbs 6:16-17** says haughty eyes are at the top of the list of things God hates.
- **James 4:6** tells us God actually opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.
- Pride is front of the line sin that God hates.

SO HOW DO WE OVERCOME PRIDE?

- 1) Use the Bible as it was intended.
 - The Bible is supposed to be used like a mirror, not binoculars.
- 2) Have a proper understanding of obedience.
 - We often congratulate ourselves for being obedient to God's laws. We believe the more we obey, the more we are earning God's favor. **Luke 17:7-10** tells us differently.
 - ◆ Obedience is far better than disobedience, but we have no reason to be spiritually proud when we obey better than the next guy.
 - ◆ We're simply doing what is required, AND IT'S WHAT'S BEST FOR US!
- Pride is a prison. Its greatest danger is that it will cause you to believe that you don't need Jesus—that you can somehow be good enough to earn God's favor.
 - But it is also a prison that perpetuates anger, hurt, and foolishness while keeping at bay the restorative effects of conviction, humility, and reconciliation.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

- Have I forgotten how horrible my sin is and how good God's mercy is?
- Do I have a “Thank God I'm not like them...” list?
- What tempts me to feel superior?

THINGS TO DO TO KILL PRIDE AND ALLOW HUMILITY TO GROW:

- Ask for forgiveness.
- Give grace—don't be easily offended.
- Seek ways to put others first.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS IN LIFE GROUPS OR WITH YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS:

Passages to consider: Luke 18:9-14

1. What was your take away from the sermon? What are you discovering about parables?
2. Read Luke 18:9-14. What is the setting that Jesus is telling the parable? Who is there? Who is he addressing?
3. Talk about what each man in the parable does.
4. What does it sound like today when people believe their own “righteousness” is good enough? (Note: this can be in a religious setting or a secular setting.) A) What can tempt you to trust in your own goodness?
5. When have you seen humbleness and trust in God's mercy modeled? A) What have you learned from that example?
6. What are ways you remind yourself of the gospel of Jesus' grace, death, life, and forgiveness for you? A) What is your response to this week's parable? With whom can you share the story or your response?

Passages to prepare for next week: Luke 13:6-9