

*9 And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. 11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. 12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' 13 "But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' 14 "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."*

This little section this morning is the beating heartbeat of the book of Luke. It is the focal center of what Luke wants to say to us. You've all heard me quote this section before, or parts of it, many times.

Because within these verses we have the answer to the question, What must a person do to be justified before God. And that question is by far the single most important question to be answered by any breathing person during their short visit on this planet, before they enter eternity.

We are, every one of us, born condemned. We literally inherited sin from our parents, all the way back to Adam. We are born into a world of sinners by sinful parents, and we are separated from our God our creator who is Holy, Holy, Holy.

We have one job to get right before we leave here and enter eternity. That one thing of eternal importance is to be justified by God, declared sinless. Washed and clothed in holiness and perfection. Otherwise God will not allow us to dwell with Him in His holy place.

In the ancient writings, from the period of Abraham, Job asks this burning question in Chapter 9. "*How can a man be right with God?*" Before the Law and the choosing and formation of a nation, a people for God's possession, Job asks the question that every person must ask and answer in order to leave this

world justified.

Most people just bumble through life and ignore the question. These days you can't even begin with the obvious. Most people don't believe there is a God. The lie of evolution that answers zero questions and is easily dis-proven has been mindlessly bought into for the convenience of simply putting a Holy God out of their minds. No God. No sin. No problem.

That's like going a hundred miles an hour down the wrong side of a busy highway and closing your eyes so you don't have to be inconvenienced by that deisel truck that's heading straight for you. I'll just simply ignore that 25 tons of metal coming at me. Brilliant plan. But the outcome is disaster.

There *is* God. God is. And God is Holy. And God will judge and condemn to eternal separation and torment, every rebellious sinner who is not holy.

How holy? Holy doesn't have levels. Holy isn't incremental. As the revelation of God unfolded in the history of the old testament writings, culminating with Jesus, who was the living, breathing, speaking Word of God in human form, that question is answered for us clearly as crystal.

How holy must we be? The question is impertinent. The word defines the answer. Holy is perfect. Flawless. Nothing less.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus finishes His first section that defines those who God will bless with these unmistakable words. In Matt. 5:48 Jesus defines holiness for us. "*Therefore you are to be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.*"

He was simply restating what God had told Moses back in Leviticus. *Be ye holy, for I AM Holy.* The standard for those who will dwell with God in eternal bliss as His children and heirs with Christ of everything is simple. Perfect, sinless, holiness. How're you doing? How's that working out for you

That is the answer to Job's question. That was always the answer, from the

beginning. Sinless perfection. Holiness. A holiness equal with God's holiness. Be ye holy, for I AM Holy. That's the requirement.

Next question. Is that possible?? Hold that thought for a few moments, because I'm going to give you the answer from Jesus mouth to our ears, and then I'm going to go back and revisit the question. Is it possible for men to be as holy as God? Perfect. Sinless.

In Matt. 19, a rich young ruler comes and asks this question. *“Teacher, what good thing must I do to obtain eternal life?”* He asks our question this morning. How is a man justified before God. Same thing. And he doesn't get the answer he was hoping for and he turns and walks away.

The disciples are dumbfounded. Jesus just sent the best candidate for the kingdom anybody ever saw packing. What in the world?? And the disciples are astonished and they ask Jesus; Matt. 19:

*25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?” 26 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”*

There's your answer. Is it possible to be holy, sinless, acceptable to God? *“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”*

Man cannot accomplish it. Impossible. The standard is impossible. We are hopeless bankrupts. But God can do it. So then, let's re-visit our question from a moment or two ago; Sinless perfection. Holiness. A holiness equal with God's holiness. Be ye holy, for I AM Holy. That's the requirement.

Next question. Is that possible?? Jesus just gave us the short answer, which is all we need. But let's unfold this dilemma a bit. If we look at history and if we look at the present carefully we find that there are actually only two religions in the world. Both religions are trying to achieve the answer to this question.

In our verses, our passage this morning we are given a picture of those 2 religions, at the same place and time, together. The 2 religions are these;

- The religion of human achievement
- The religion of divine accomplishment

That's it. Two religions but the first one takes on every possible form imaginable. The word imaginable is important, because that's where they all come from. Human imagination. Flights of fancy.

The religion of human achievement in all of its innumerable forms has this belief at its core. I can be good enough that God will accept me.

Even in our post "post-modern" world where we struggle with the difficulty of removing a sky god concept from our recent memories we find that 28% of our population will tell you, I don't believe in any creator sky god person as defined in some ancient story, but I am spiritual. I do believe there is; other.

I believe there is more going on than our eyes and senses can physically perceive. Something's out there. So what is the new code for the religion of human achievement. We hear it almost every day. Oh, he's a "good person".

Or to get in line with the current politically correct rules of human achievement, we can no longer say he or she, we must now say Oh, they is a good person.

Goodness. What is it? Who defines it? Well for us in 2021, a good person is one who believes in the tenets of the religion of absolute personal autonomy as those changing tenets are unfolded to us. The rules change every day, but a good person is on board with whatever the talking heads in the lead tell us is the new normal for absolute personal autonomy.

Live and let live. Accept and be accepted. Don't judge what another they is doing. As long as they is not hurting some other they, goodness flows. Be a good person. Get in line. Unite. Or else.

That's just our current generations flight of human fancy, but this religion has been present since Adam. The religion of human achievement. Be good. Be a good person. God, if there is one, whoever they is, will accept you if you're a good person.

Look down through all of the centuries in every corner of the world in every time and in every place, religions have developed, out of human imagination, and I will state very plainly, not only human imagination, but that spiritual "other" that undefined spiritual other has helped with the human imagination, and religions from the minds of men and women and demons have dominated this planet since Adam.

All of them have some code of good-ness. Even the ones that slaughter babies, born and unborn, are appeasing their imagined gods in the name of some form of good-ness.

Jeremiah 17:9 says; *The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.* Human imagination combined with all the forces of hell create religions. Everything from the bizarre to our Mormon neighbors that we love. Everything from cannibalism to sati.

In 1829 the British banned the practice of suttee. That's where a widow who remains after her husband's death was put into the funeral pyre, and burned alive with the dead person. Why? It was the ritual of Hindus in which the widowed women have to burn in the funeral pyre of their husbands. The women who do this were praised. It was believed that if the woman will follow this ritual, she would be liked by the god.

God will accept you if you offer yourself as a burnt sacrifice upon your husbands funeral fire. Human achievement. Every possible form. From demented sinful human imagination in combination with evil spirits.

Molech worship appears in Leviticus 18 where God bans what the Molloch worshipers were doing to achieve acceptance with their gods. They were

burning babies alive. Casting living babies into the fire as an appeasement offering to the god molloch. Human achievement. Human imaginations combined with satanic spiritual influence.

So the world without God takes on bizzarre forms of religious human achievement. Concoctions from fallen imagination combined with hell. And everything in-between. Satan isn't too particular which road you take to hell, as long as you get there.

Mormonism is a good example for us. Human imagination, old Joe Smith had quite the imagination, and I don't doubt for a moment that he derived his religion from an angelic encounter. A weird combination of Masonry with all these confusing christian parallels. They invented a new jesus. They have jesus and they just love to worship jesus, but it isn't the Jesus of our bibles. Their jesus doesn't forgive sin. Bummer.

But Satan offers a variety from the bizzare human living sacrifices to extremely moral people with a ton of confusing parallels with the real truth. Mormonism is human achievement identically but different from human sacrifice. In every form and style and color and variety; the religion of satan is human achievement. Hello? Roman catholicism? Is it human achievement?

OK, I've made everybody possible mad this morning. But there is a method to my madness. Because in our story this morning, Jesus is short and direct, and He gives us a parable that shows us very clearly the two religions of this world; in the same room at the same time. And He tells us, only one of them was acceptable to God.

Way back in chapter 16 we are introduced to some pharisee's and we are told that they were scoffing at Jesus. Scoffing. It doesn't get any lower than when you are laughing at some other human. Scoffing. He's ridiculous. It's a statement. Jesus is an imbecile. A human joke. That's what scoffing means.

*Luke 16:14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things, and they were scoffing at Him. 15 And He said to them, "You*

*are those who **justify yourselves** in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men (human achievement) is detestable in the sight of God.*

That defines for us the two opposing religions that we will see in our verses this morning. The pharisee's are the religion of human achievement. They are working to achieve righteousness and acceptance with God by their own efforts at not only keeping the law, they've invented a whole host of new traditions that surpass the law of Moses.

The religion of human achievement scoffs at Jesus, the son of God. And Jesus says, they were those who were justifying themselves. But then Jesus says, there's a problem. God see's inside of hearts. And what God finds in the human heart is detestable. Gross. Filth. We're talking SCBA filth. Inside the human heart you'll need a self contained breathing apparatus. The filth inside of human hearts in not only gross, it's dangerous. Detestable to God.

The lines are drawn. Human achievement; Jesus is an imbecile to scoff at. We're able to do this on our own. We don't need Him. And divine accomplishment that looks inside hearts and says this filth isn't getting into my heaven. It may look Oh So Good to the world, but inside the heart is vile dangerous filth. God will need to cleanse this filth. We can't do it.

We're going to see both of those possible religions in our story this morning. That's a long introduction because the story itself needs very little exegesis. If you understand the premise that we spent time defining, this little story is as simple as it gets.

But the profundity of the simplicity is eternal. One party will spend eternity in the presence of God. The other party is headed to eternal torment in hell apart from God. There was never a more important story to understand. Ever. Eternity hangs in the balance.

*Vs. 9 And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:*

Luke prefaces Jesus teaching. Luke tells us this is a parable. It's a made up story with imaginary people in order to teach a specific point. And Luke tells us who the parable was for. Certain ones. *tinas* The pronoun simply means anyone who falls within the defined group.

What's the defined group. Also defined by Luke. Those persons who trust in their own accomplishment of righteousness, and a second defining characteristic; they view all others who don't measure up to their own defined standard with contempt. Losers. Like Jesus who they scoffed at. Those folks

Call them anything you like. Pharisee is a bit too defined. This is the category of the religion of human achievement. Very broad. Many colors and styles. But they hold this in common with each other everywhere on earth; They trust in their accomplishment. They despise others who don't measure up to their definitions. That's who Jesus is speaking to.

The Mormons. I'm just picking on them because they're handy. Sweet folks and we love 'em. But if you get to talking with them you'll find out real quick; You're a gentile. They're in, you're out. They're the chosen people and you're on the outside looking in. They're depending on their own good works and they hold what you believe in contempt. Foolish lost gentiles. That's us.

Another clue that will get me in more trouble. Is there a group you can think of in Washington DC that despises people who believe the words of this ancient book are authoritative truth that defines acceptable morality? Do they hold us in contempt? If they do, are they not a religion of human achievement with a defined righteousness that despises all who don't meet their new righteousness?

Exactly what Luke defined with the word *tinas*. Certain ones. Anyone in the religion of human achievement. It isn't just the pharisee's of Jesus day. This parable still applies today just as much as it did when Jesus spoke it. We still have "certain ones" with us, alive and present, today. Same group, different names.

Luke says, this story is for any one who depends on their own righteous achievement to be OK, and Oh, by the way, those folks scoff at anyone who doesn't go along with their program. Those folks. Religious human achievers

But in Jesus day they are represented by the pharisee's who pretty much defined the religion of the day in the land of Israel. Those are the trappings for Jesus parable. They were the group with the power of their defined righteousness. And doesn't Satan make a confusing mess of religion. The murderers of Jesus are the fundamentalists that cling to God's book.

*10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer.*

Pharisee. The pinnacle of human achievement. God's law given by Moses was too easy for these folks. They could achieve Oh so much more than Moses simple commands from God. They built layer upon layer of human achievement until the real law of God was lost somewhere in the pile on.

Their religion forgot about the heart. It was purely external. Religiosity ad infinitum ad nauseum. All of it to be seen by men. Their heart condition before God was lost in the religion. They were so righteous that God might have to step it up a bit to get in their category.

And they despised all comers. Everyone else, they considered as cursed by God. Worthless cursed refuse, of no value to God. Regular people, regular ordinary jews were just cursed losers. But wait, you could go even lower than ordinary cursed lost jews. Ordinary lost countrymen.

Enter the next character in this little drama. Remember, two men went up into the temple to pray. The opposing character in this little play, this parable is; a tax gatherer.

To the pharisee's a tax gatherer is a prostitute. A person who sold themselves to Rome in order to gain riches. A person who, like any whore, has a price

and can be bought. Despised, human scum. Human sewage. Not just of no value, this person is that, but he is beyond worthless, he's vile filth.

And the entire pharisaic religion is built around becoming clean and staying clean. This person gives a whole new meaning to social distancing. The pharisee's couldn't get far enough away from such a vile filthy disgusting whore of a person. Human excrement. Tax gatherers. The bottom.

So then, our two players, a pharisee, the pinnacle of self righteousness, and a tax gatherer the most vile of persons in the local imagination. They both go into the house of God.

Did anyone watch the interfaith prayer service at the inauguration? A drama with players, each playing their part to accomplish a whole. It's a dramatic production to be viewed. Theatre. It's a statement. It's identical to the next part of Jesus parable. Same show, different channel.

*11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. 12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'*

He was praying, but it wasn't to God. He was praying to himself. The Jews had to come up with rules about voice volume. It could get to be a contest of voices, all wanting to be heard over each other, all commanding the most presence, all of it theatre to be seen and heard by . . . not God, other men.

It was a show of religiosity. His one reference to God isn't about God, it's about him. God we can both agree that I'm awesome, and I'm willing to share some of the credit with you. You made me. But I did the rest. Thanks for me.

I'm better than all the others. I don't swindle. I'm just. I'm not an adulterer. And most of all I'm not anything like this human excrement also in the room that is so filthy we all have to hold our nose. This tax gatherer.

His prayer reminds me of most of the modern christian music. me me me me my my I I me. Truly the object worthy of worship isn't God, it's this awesome person who is praying. He is at the very pinnacle of human religious achievement. And he is giving a dramatic performance all about ME.

2nd player in the drama;

*13 “But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’*

His display is different. First of all it isn't a theatrical performance for others to see. His is the posture of brokenness. His posture is that of a bankrupt pleading for mercy because he has no resources to repay his debt. Nor will he ever have the resources. He has no sense of himself or the others around him who look on. This conversation is between Holy God and bankrupt sinner.

His plea is simple. Mercy. I'm a bankrupt. I have no resources to be holy as You are Holy. I'm a guilty sinner. I'm deserving of your full judgements. The only card I've got is to beg for mercy.

The word that Jesus used in this story that is translated mercy, is not the usual word for mercy. It is the word; hilaskomai: It's only used two times in the new testament and the other use is in Hebrews chapter 2 where it says of Jesus

*17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make **propitiation** for the sins of the people*

Propitiation. It means to appease. To restore two parties by making appeasement to the injured party that satiates their anger. In ancient greek literature the word is used for sacrifices made to appease an angry deity.

This man is asking God who is rightfully angry to be propitious. To somehow pardon the debt, the offense so that reconciliation can happen. All of our

doctrines of atonement for sin are rooted in this man's word as given here by Jesus. Restoration. Appeasement. Forgiveness. Mercy. All of those ideas are bound up in this unusual word. The man is bankrupt. The appeasement, the payment must come from the other party. He begs God for restoration, reconciliation, forgiveness of a debt he has no resources to repay.

Divine accomplishment. Human achievement. How close does human achievement ever get to holy? The divine standard of God's holiness. Was God impressed with the extreme inflated pride of the pharisee spouting about his achieved holiness?

The pharisee achieved all kinds of external pluses. On a chart of assets and liabilities, he's checking off all of the outwardly seen boxes on the assets side. But what's going on inside that pharisee, and why does he despise others who are lower achievers than him? Pride. Pride.

Proverbs 6 tells of 7 things God hates. Guess what tops the list;  
*“These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren”*

Pride is an assault on God Himself. Satan's original sin was the assault of pride. *I will be like the most high God.* Isaiah 14:14 God hates all of that other stuff, it's all important, it all brings His wrath, it's all an abomination, but pride is first.

The religion of human achievement bolsters the one sin God hates most. Every religious system worldwide is based in human achievement and pride. Arrogance. A haughty look. And God hates it. All of the worlds religion is only stirring up more wrath from God. The religion of human achievement is an abomination to God.

The other fellow, on the other hand comes empty handed. He's a spiritual bankrupt. Blessed are the poor in spirit. We could say it Blessed are the

spiritually bankrupt. Why? Because bankrupts have only one possible source. Divine accomplishment. They've got nothing to bring.

Blessed are those who mourn, This guy comes to God in a state of broken hearted distress. Why? Because he's a sinner and he knows it and he knows he's bankrupt to do anything about it. God is holy. He is vile. He gets it. That acknowledgement brings sorrow. True sorrow. Beating his breast sorrow. He's mourning over his sinfulness that has harmed and angered a holy God.

“Blessed are the meek” Blessed are the powerless. The first step towards God's holiness is in the acknowledgement that you are powerless to take any steps at all. The meek are the powerless. Again, bankruptcy is such a good word. You come to God broken, meek, powerless. Helpless to affect anything towards His standard of holiness.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” This guy knows he's a spiritual bankrupt, but the reason he's in the house of God pleading for mercy is because he has a hunger and a thirst, a desire to be acceptable to God. His route isn't achievement, it's forgiveness.

Which of the two men will we see in heaven?

*14 “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other;*

The bankrupt person left God's house . . . justified. The tense of the verb used here is important. justified, perfect passive participle, having been once for all justified, it means this is done with permanent results, permanently right with God. God did it and it's finished.

It's a legal term. It's the expungement of the liabilities that held you guilty and in contempt of the other party. Justified means all of the debt . . . is gone. Expunged. Cleared. Erased.

Jesus doesn't go into the mechanics of how that actually happens. How can righteous God, who said *“I will by no means let the guilty go unpunished”* Ex.

34 just pronounce "Justified". Where did the sin go. How was the required punishment executed. How does a just God simply say; "Justified"?

We learn the mechanics of substitutionary atonement in other places. How Jesus dies, for us, in our place. He takes the required punishment and He then accounts to our accounts His perfect righteousness. That's a different lesson for a different day.

But here we simply see, God responds to pride with rejection and the wrath that is due. The religion of human achievement only achieves hell. A deserved hell. All your religiosity simply added to the ballooning pride in the liability column. The pharisee actually left the temple with a larger unpayable debt than he went in with. He added more pride to his list of sins he can never propitiate for.

But the tax collector left "justified". Pre-cross. This is an old testament justification. The old testament jews were justified by divine accomplishment even before the cross. The cross accomplished their salvation the same as it accomplishes ours. For them it was looking forward. For us we look back.

Jesus sums up with an axiom. A proverb.

*for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."*

Everything in God's kingdom is polar opposite of what we are born with in Satan's realm. Pride is our natural sinful default. God hates it. Humility is un-natural to our sinful natures, but compared to God's holiness, we are humiliated. When we understand anything at all about holiness, it turns our sinful pride into humiliated shame. But that's where we approach God from.

Humility, humiliated shame at our bankruptcy of holiness is where the religion of divine accomplishment operates out of. As we close, please listen to a transliteration of the first four beatitudes based on what we've learned in our study this morning.

3 *“Blessed are the spiritually bankrupt, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

4 *“Blessed are brokenhearted over sin, for they shall be comforted.*

5 *“Blessed are the powerless, for they shall inherit the earth.*

6 *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for holiness not their own, for they shall be satisfied.*