

- ***Read Luke 18:1-14/Prayer*** I wonder if we sometimes lose track of the fact that when Jesus taught, He didn't just teach to teach, but He taught with a purpose. Thankfully, this is really shown to us by the Gospel writers. Luke particularly is good about including this in his recording of the teachings of Jesus. Notice that this chapter begins with Luke stating that Jesus was telling them this "parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart." (**Luke 1:1**) Then Jesus goes into this parable concerning the needy widow who was being oppressed, but the wicked judge did nothing to help her. Notice two extremely important words in this parable. Jesus uses the word "unrighteous" to describe the judge, and he says twice that God would bring "justice" for the widow and all of the elect or righteous. (**1:7,8**)
- Then we see Jesus quickly transitioning into another parable. This time, Luke previews the parable by saying that Jesus "told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt". (**1:9**) This parable concerns two men who went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, the religious elite of the time, and the other was a lowly tax collector, one of those people who others viewed with contempt. After stating how each of the men prayed, Jesus focuses on something that we ought to see as being extremely valuable. Jesus focuses on the fact that one of the men went to his house justified while the other did not.
- So what is the big deal with justification? Why did the widow seek justification from the unrighteous judge against those who wrongly oppressed her? Why does Jesus focus on the one man going to his house justified? Let me suggest that it is because justification plays a major role in our relationship with God. But...what does it mean to be justified? Simply put in a religious context, to be justified is to be declared right or righteous in the eyes of God. Is this not something that we all ought to be seeking? To be able to stand before God justified? Let's take a few minutes to consider this idea of justification and how we can come to stand before God justified.

I. Righteousness leads to justification.

- A. God desires His people to be righteous.
 1. Stated another way, God desires for His people to be morally upright, pure, and holy in heart and action. God has always put a major emphasis on His people be righteous. "To do righteousness and justice is desired by the Lord more than sacrifice." (**Prov. 21:3**)
 2. Just anyone could offer a sacrifice to God, but the point of the Proverb is to say that the person first and foremost needs to be a person of upright, pure, and holy character. God is seeking for us to have a righteous heart that directs the way in which we will walk.
 3. In order for us to attain to righteousness, God has given us His Word so that we can know how to live in righteousness. (**II Tim. 3:16**) He gave us His Son as a standard to imitate. (**I John 2:28,29**) If we want to be one with Jesus then we must be righteous as He is righteous. We must have faith in Him for righteousness and faith go hand in hand.
- B. He desires righteousness so that we can stand before Him in His presence justified.
 1. Our sins have separated us from God because He can't allow sin and uncleanness in His presence, so what is the remedy to be joined back in fellowship with God? Righteousness through faith. (**Rom. 3:21-25**)
 2. Furthermore, Paul goes on to explain that it is through our faith in Jesus that we can be justified before God. (**Rom. 5:1,2**) It is through this faith and righteous living that we can be found justified in the sight of God and receive the many spiritual blessings that come with such standing.
 3. So what is the deal then with the two men back in Luke 18? As we finish out this lesson, notice that the major problem with one of these men was his approach to God concerning righteousness while the other came to God in a completely different manner. Our attitude and mindset of righteousness goes a long way in determine how God will receive us.

II. The Pharisee was not justified because he sought to prove his righteousness.

- A. The Pharisee approached God thinking God could be impressed by his resume. (**Luke 18:11,12**)
 1. The Pharisee was proud of himself, thus we see Jesus that he was standing and praying and thanking God that he was better than other people. He was a man filled with pride in himself.
 2. He listed all of these external things that he did. All things that were visible and measurable. Things that others could see that might impress them. Things that he could see that he could take pride in.
 3. He also stressed how he was better compared to other people. He wasn't like the sinners, but he was better than that. He knew what other people did, and he knew that he was better than that.

4. Did you notice what this man never did though? He never asked for anything in this prayer. He never asked for God's mercy, grace, or aid. In his mind, he was sufficient as is and he was in need of nothing. He felt as if he could stand justified before God simply because of his bright and shining resume that he could just slap down on God's desk.
- B. This mindset isn't reserved just for this man, but we must be careful to avoid it within our own minds.
1. Sadly, we sometimes have this misconception that we must seek to do enough or be good enough so that God will love us and accept us and allow us to stand before Him, but that just isn't the case. Our resume of righteousness will never be enough to impress God.
 2. On top of that, this type of approach to righteousness and God is dangerous for us because we will never fully live up to God's lofty standards. We will make mistakes and if we live with this type of mindset then we will constantly be let down by our mistakes and our spiritual health will be unstable at best.
 3. Then not only that, but we can't be a righteous people and treat others with contempt. We can't have this spiritually competitive mindset where we're just trying to be better than others. That isn't faithfulness and righteousness. We're not supposed to put others down, but we are supposed to mourn with those who mourn and rejoice with those who rejoice. The Pharisee couldn't do that because he rejoiced in others failures and mourned with other rejoiced in their successes. We must ourselves to be drawn in to the terrible mindset of this Pharisee or we will never be justified.

III. The Tax Collector went to his house justified because he sought for God's righteousness.

- A. The Tax Collector came from the opposite direction. He appealed to God's mercy and grace to be made righteous before God. **(Luke 18:13)**
1. He knew that he was not enough by himself. His humility was obvious in his behavior. It was obvious in the fact that he couldn't even lift his eyes toward God. He didn't feel worthy to look up to where God is, but instead he beat his chest and begged for God's grace and mercy. He knew that justification wasn't something that he himself was capable of apart from the power of God.
 2. Because of this recognition, he begged that God would work in him to make him what he knew he needed to be. "Lord, YOU make me clean and whole." How often do we waste so much time trying to figure out how to fix ourselves when we ought to be putting that energy towards allowing God to guide us in our efforts to be what we ought to be?
 3. So how is it then that God can make us righteous? He makes us righteous through our faith in the One who was truly righteous. In Christ ALONE can we find righteousness. We rely upon the righteousness of Christ to appease God, to be the propitiation through our faith in Him. **(I John 2:2)** Our faith in Him is shown in the way we live this life. It is seen in the fact that we shun that which is evil and we cling to Christ and those things which are good. In this manner we allow the Spirit to work in us and through us. **(Rom. 5:5)**
- B. This idea really boils down to our mindset in regards to God, who He is, and what He expects of us.
1. The difference between the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is the fact that the Pharisee wasn't of the mindset that he needed God, and the Tax Collector knew that he only had a chance at all because of God. For those of us who are Christians, we can figure out which mindset we possess by how we answer the question "why were you saved?"
 2. If we say we were saved because we did this, this, or that then we're not looking at it the right way. Sure we wouldn't be saved if we didn't believe and obey, but we need to first and foremost recognize that we are saved because of God. We were saved because God allowed us to be saved through the terms he designated. We weren't saved by our own works, but we were saved purely through the grace and mercy of God. **(Eph. 2:8,9; Titus 3:5-7)**
 3. That **Titus 3:5-7** is especially telling. God didn't save us because we had done that which was righteous...we didn't earn a thing by doing what was right. But He save us because He is merciful and gracious. The Tax Collector realized that, and we must realize this just the same.

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Both men went to the temple to pray, but only one left justified. That one, the Tax Collector, was justified because he relied wholly and solely upon the God of heaven for his righteousness. May we be of the exact same mindset and course of action. May we rely upon God's mercy and grace for justification, and may we live lives that seek to imitate the righteousness of our Savior Jesus Christ. May we through the power of God be able go to our eternal home justified in His sight.