

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/6/92
Luke 18:9-14 "Who Benefits from God's Grace?"

Intro:

Grace is a wonderful thing! The God of the Bible is a God of grace!

Q: Who benefits from God's grace?

A: You say, "Well everyone does!" That's true when it comes to common grace. By God's common grace, we enjoy the benefits of air to breathe, food to eat, water to drink, rain to nourish the soil, and so much more. Common grace is God's provision for daily living. Every person, whether saved or not, benefits from God's common grace.

But not everyone is enjoying the benefits of God's special grace. Not everyone enjoys the privilege of living in a right relationship with God. And it is a privilege.

So who benefits from grace?

Proposition: Jesus told a shocking parable in Luke 18:9-14 that explains who enjoys the benefits from God's grace. Let's consider 3 things.

- I. The Setting (9)
- II. The Story (10-13)
- III. The Significance (14)

I. The Setting (9)

V 9 "And He spoke this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves..."

The gospel of Luke presents a special portrait of Jesus Christ. Luke reveals a Messiah who was especially sensitive to the needs of the common people of the day. He emphasized Jesus' compassion for the poor, for those who were downcast and overlooked in society.

In Luke 15, Jesus told 3 parables about lost items--the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. His point is unmistakably clear. Lost people matter to God!

Illust:

I want you to see 2 important things relating to the setting:

A. The Question--18:8

V 8 "When the Son of man comes shall He find faith on earth?"

That question concluded Jesus' first parable about prayer.

Q: Why did Jesus ask THAT question?

A: In part because there's a problem--the problem of Self-Righteousness.

B. The Conflict--18:9

V 9 "He spoke this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves...righteous"

There was a fierce conflict developing between the Pharisees and Jesus. It had been building for months.

See:

15:1-2 "...and the Pharisees murmured..."

16:14 "And the Pharisees...derided Him."

17:20 "And when He was demanded of the Pharisees..."

Listen. There is a key issue underlying the parable we're about to hear.

Key Issue: How does a person become righteous? Get right with God?

The Pharisees touted boldly that they were right with God. And most of the Jews believed them. They were zealous, committed, religious. No question about that. But were they righteous, and right with God?

Let's listen to the story...

II. The Story (10-11)

V 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray..."

Now right off the bat, we have a problem. Do you know what picture we have in mind? Here's the scene most of us have. We see the Temple. We see 2 men standing in the Temple court, only 2. The reason we see only 2 is because the text says they went up to pray. And prayer for us Americans is primarily a PRIVATE affair. Prayer is something we do in private devotions.

That was not the case in the Eastern culture in which Jesus lived. When Jesus told this story, His audience pictured a different scene. Prayer in the Temple was NOT strictly a private affair. It was public, corporate worship. This parable is not presenting 2 men doing private devotions, but 2 men in the midst of a bunch of other people participating in a worship service.

How do we know that? First, because they went to the "temple" to pray. The temple was where you went for corporate worship, not private devotions. Secondly, v 13 says the tax collector stood "afar off." Afar off from whom? The Pharisee? Yes. And the rest of the worshippers.

Key: The scene described here is a public worship service. Twice a day, in the morning and evening, Jews would gather in the Temple while the priests offered animals for the atoning sacrifice. Prayers were an important part of this sacrificial service.

Jesus tells about 2 men that attended the worship service one day...

A. The Pharisee

Notice what he did...

Vv 11-12 "The Pharisee stood..."

The Pharisee stood. And the Pharisee prayed "with himself." What a proud man! There he stands, impressive, dignified, with a fine religious reputation.

What did he pray?

1. I thank Thee.
2. I am not as other men are.
3. I fast twice a week.
4. I give tithes of all I possess.

Notice 2 very important things about this man. First, when he prayed, what did he do? He congratulated himself. He advertised himself. He told God what a good man he was. He reminded God how fortunate He was to have him on His team!

Illust:

And second, the Pharisee used other people as his standard for measuring righteousness. V 11 "I am not like other MEN..." As he looked around the room, he fixed his eyes on the guy in the back, a rotten tax-collector. The Pharisee looked so good when he compared himself to THAT guy! And he told God so!

Illust: We do that sometimes when we pray. "God thank you that we're in church right now. There are a lot of people that aren't you know." Which may be a pious way to say, "God you sure are lucky that I'm such a nice guy that I took time out of my busy schedule to be here!"

Key: Don't miss this. The Pharisee thought he was righteous because of WHAT HE DID. He stood. He prayed. He fasted. He tithed. He gave. He did not live like others.

Did he impress men? Yes. Did he impress God? Wait and see...

B. The Tax Collector

Before looking at him, remember something very important. What took place at the Temple where the 2 men prayed? The atonement sacrifice. God spelled out clearly in Leviticus, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." (Heb 9) God's Word reveals the condition of mankind in frank terms. The tax collector knew what the Scriptures said:

"There is none righteous, no not one." (Ps 14:1-3)

"All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags (Is 64:6)

The tax collector knew he was unholy, unacceptable before God. He knew he had a sin problem. He knew he had offended a holy God by his sins. He knew he was helpless. He knew he needed God's forgiveness. He knew there was only one way he could obtain that forgiveness. He needed God's mercy. He needed atonement for his sins. He needed to have his sins covered by the substitutionary atonement of the lamb being offered in the temple.

Watch what the tax collector did...

V 13 "And the tax collector...saying, God be merciful..."

What a contrast! Unlike the Pharisee, this man stood afar off. He would not so much as lift his eyes. And what did he do with his hands?

He beat his chest. Why? He was overcome by his own sense of guilt and shame due to his sinful condition. He knew his real problem was under his chest, in his heart. He knew his heart was the source of his evil thoughts and deeds. He recognized the truth about his heart condition. So out of remorse, he beat his chest.

Objection: Someone may say, "Man that guy had a bad self-image. He shouldn't put himself down like that. He needed to think positively about himself."

Key: We'll never have a good self-esteem until we have a correct self-esteem. And we'll never have a correct self-esteem until we admit the truth about our condition.

Quote: Someone has said, "The gate of heaven is so low that none can enter it save upon his knees."

You say, "Well, I'm not a hypocrite like the Pharisee. And I'm certainly not a wild sinner like the tax-collector. So I must be OK."

May I remind you of the Phariss'es' real problem? He used other people as his measuring stick for righteousness. He didn't think he was in danger because he was so good compared to other people. When we compare ourselves with people, we can always come out looking good. But when we compare ourselves with God's holy standard, we'll fall on knees crying out for mercy.

Challenge: Many of us are more like the Pharisees than we care to admit. Listen. As long as we're like the Pharisees, we'll never fully appreciate the Grace of God.

Look carefully at what came out of the tax collector's mouth. "God be merciful to me a sinner." His prayer shocks us because:

1. It's a short prayer. (In my English Bible, only 7 words)
2. It's a humble prayer. ("to me a sinner")
3. It's a prayer admitting need. For what? ("Be merciful.")

Remember what piece of furniture was in the Temple? The Mercy Seat!

What verb did the man use? "Have mercy." Do you know what that means? It means "to make propitiation for, to make an atonement for."

Do you know what the tax collector is asking? As he saw the smoke of sacrifice rising from the Holy Place, he cried this, "O God, I'm a sinner. I've offended You. But I've come to the Temple today because this is the place where you've instructed us to offer the sacrificial lamb. You have said that forgiveness is available only through sacrifice. O, would you have mercy on me?! O, would you cover my sins today?! Would you make an atonement for me?!"

Illust:

What's the point of the story? Remember the original question...

Q: How does a man become righteous with God? Listen to the punchline...

III. The Significance (14)

V 14 "I tell you...justified..."

To be "justified" means to be declared righteous, and right with God.

Which man went home right with God that day? Which man walked down the Temple steps justified and righteous? The man who admitted his guilt before God, and cried out for God's forgiveness.

Q: Why did God forgive the tax collector?

A: Because he deserved it? No. Because of GRACE!

Eph 2:8 "For by grace are you saved through faith..."

Jm 4:6 "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

I Pt 5:5 "...be clothed with humility; for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble."

Illust:

Q: Who benefits from grace?

A: Those who have gotten right with God. Those who have admitted the truth about their sinful condition. Those who have received God's forgiveness which is available through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Oh friend, you can be religious and not benefit from grace! You can pray and not benefit from grace. You can give, go to church, live a moral life. You can do it all! But those that benefit from God's grace are not those that exalt in their own efforts, but in Christ's.

Key: Righteousness is not something we can achieve. It must be received!

Illust:

In a moment, we're going to hear 2 testimonies from people who know the benefits of God's grace. But I want you to ponder a question...

Q: Do you know the benefits of God's grace? Have you ever cried out, "God be merciful to me a sinner."? Have you ever asked God to cleanse your heart? Have you ever received His forgiveness.

If not, why not today?

Is you have, praise God for His Grace!