

LUKE 18:9-17

**DISCIPLESHIP AS HUMILITY AND FAITH**

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Today we continue our journey with Jesus. As you recall, Luke presents Jesus walking from Galilee to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is Jesus' final destiny. There he will confront the religious and political powers. They will crucify him. But crucifixion is not the end, but the beginning for Jesus.

Along the way to Jerusalem, Jesus invites his disciples, including you and me, to learn what it means to walk with him on route to crucifixion. He invites us to share in the divine life on earth, which is cruciform existence.

The passage today centers on one question: *How do disciples of Jesus establish and cultivate a relationship with God?*

**A. Relationship with God****Questions:**

- What does it mean to have a relationship with God?
- How do people establish and nurture a relationship with God?
- If your relationship with God was stronger, what would change for you?

**B. The Pharisee and Tax Collector (9-14)**

<sup>9</sup> He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' <sup>13</sup> 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

<sup>9</sup> Ἐἶπεν δὲ καὶ πρὸς τινὰς τοὺς πεποιθότας ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς ὅτι εἰσὶν δίκαιοι καὶ ἐξουθενοῦντας τοὺς λοιποὺς τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην. <sup>10</sup> Ἄνθρωποι δύο ἀνέβησαν εἰς τὸ ἱερόν προσεύξασθαι, ὁ εἷς Φαρισαῖος καὶ ὁ ἕτερος τελώνης. <sup>11</sup> ὁ Φαρισαῖος σταθεὶς πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ταῦτα προσήχετο· ὁ θεός, εὐχαριστῶ σοι ὅτι οὐκ εἰμὶ ὡς περ οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἄρπαγες, ἄδικοι, μοιχοί, ἢ καὶ ὡς οὗτος ὁ τελώνης. <sup>12</sup> νηστεύω δις τοῦ σαββάτου, ἀποδεκατῶ πάντα ὅσα κτῶμαι. <sup>13</sup> ὁ δὲ τελώνης μακρόθεν ἑστὼς οὐκ ᾔθελεν οὐδὲ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐπᾶραι εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, ἀλλ' ἔτυπεν τὸ στήθος αὐτοῦ λέγων· ὁ θεός, ἰλάσθητί μοι τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ. <sup>14</sup> λέγω ὑμῖν,

<p>me, a sinner!' <sup>14</sup> 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."</p>	<p>κατέβη οὗτος δεδικαιωμένος εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ παρ' ἐκείνων· ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ὑψῶν ἑαυτὸν ταπεινωθήσεται, ὁ δὲ ταπεινῶν ἑαυτὸν ὑψωθήσεται.</p>
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In this episode, Jesus addresses people who inwardly boast about their own achievements and look down on or had "contempt" for others.

Apparently, Jesus reads their minds and gives them a parable to chew on. The parable is really about two kinds of prayers or two ways to approach God. One is represented by a Pharisee and the other by a tax collector.

During the time of Jesus, Pharisees were actually respected religious authorities. They were known for keeping the Law of Moses even more strictly than what Moses taught. They took extra precautions to be ceremonially clean, so they kept away from anyone or anything that was unclean or defiled.

In contrast, tax collectors were despised. Tax collectors were Jews who collected taxes from other Jews for the Romans and then skimmed a portion of the taxes for themselves. So tax collectors were viewed as traitors and dishonest. But, in addition, they were viewed as idolatrous and unclean because they handled money that had the image of Caesar or some king, which, of course, broke the commandment regarding not making graven images. Simply put, tax collectors were "sinners" or *harmartoloi*, people who were not Torah observant or didn't keep the Law.

So, the parable begins with these two men on their way to pray *at the same time*. They entered the Temple to participate in one of two daily services. Two times a day (9 am and 3 pm), a lamb was sacrifice for the sins of Israel. This was called *Tamid*.<sup>1</sup> After the animal was sacrifice, the officiating priest would sprinkle the blood on the altar, trumpets and cymbals would sound out, Psalms were read, and people would offer their prayers.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. The Pharisee

What do you notice about this Pharisee?

<sup>1</sup> Refers to a regular burnt offering. "Hebrew *tamid* may mean 'with unfailing regularity' or 'uninterruptedly.' Thus, the *olat tamid* refers to the burnt offering brought twice daily, while *esh tamid* is the fire that burns perpetually on the altar and is never extinguished." Nahum Sarna, *Exodus*, JPS.

<sup>2</sup> For a description of the service, see Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (Grand Rapids: IVP, 2008) 346

- Stands by himself, apart from other people (doesn't want to defile himself)
- He thanks God he is not like "other people" (οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων)—commoners who didn't strictly observe the law
- He compares himself to others, rather than God's expectation for him
- He reminds God of his accomplishments
- Five times in two verse he uses the first person singular pronoun ("I"), making himself the major subject of the prayer

How would you characterize his attitude?

- He is self-exalting
- Boasts of self-accomplishment
- He thought he had done more than God required
- He was grateful for himself, not grateful to God
- He didn't really thank God, but gave a long list of personal achievements
- He is judgmental
- He assumes God's role of judge
- He reminds God of the deficiencies of other people
- He is smug and self-satisfied: "God was very fortunate to have someone like him."<sup>3</sup>
- He felt he had "earned" God's praise!

## 2. The Tax Collector

What do you notice about the tax collectors?

- He stood at a distance (he was defiled and didn't want to defile others)
- He would not even look up to heaven (a sign of shame)
- He beat his chest (a sign of repentance)
- He said he was "a sinner," that he did not keep the Torah (*harmartoloi*)
- He asked for mercy; literally, "God, make an atonement for me a sinner" (ὁ θεός, ἰλάσθητί μοι τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ).

How would you characterize his attitude?

- Humble; he didn't boast about anything
- Contrite; he regretted his sins and offenses
- Honest; he recognizes his need for God
- He didn't judge others
- Dependent on God; threw himself on God's mercy

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Stein, *Luke* (1992) 448.

### 3. Humility and Justification

Jesus concludes by saying that this man was justified (δεδικαιωμένος perfect passive participle from δικαιόω)—the passive verb indicates that he received the action of the verb; that is, God was the one who justified him, not him.

What does “justified” mean? It refers to God declaring someone to be righteous and “righteousness” refers to being in a right relationship God. It is a legal metaphor that describes a person standing before God and being fully accepted by God. And part of that acceptance is being forgiven by God. It is God’s action, God’s decision alone. Humans contribute nothing, except humility.

That is why Jesus quotes the proverb: “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted” (18:4).

Sin for Jesus is not primarily a broken law but a broken relationship. When we turn to God in faith (trust) with the right attitude (humility) our relationship with God is restored and we can begin to be healed.

### 4. Humility and faith

From this parable we are told that God accepts or justifies those who approach God in humility.

But where does faith fit in? Doesn’t Paul say?

- We are “justified by faith apart from works of law” (Rom 3:28; cf. Gal 3:24).
- We are “justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Rom 5:1)

The question is: What is the relationship between humility and faith?

- What is the relationship between “being humble before God” and “having faith in God”?
- Are they the same thing?
- If they are different, how are they related?

Stein writes, “The kind of faith acceptable to God is described as being one of humility.”<sup>4</sup> But has he put it correctly?

## C. Infants and Children (15-17)

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<sup>4</sup> Stein, *Luke* (1992) 452.

Luke has organized his story about Jesus so that each episode illuminates the previous episode and the following one. So, we must ask, what does humility have to do with infants, children, and the Kingdom of God, which is our next story? .

<sup>15</sup> People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. <sup>17</sup> Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

<sup>15</sup> Προσέφερον δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ τὰ βρέφη ἵνα αὐτῶν ἅπτηται· ἰδόντες δὲ οἱ μαθηταὶ ἐπετίμων αὐτοῖς. <sup>16</sup> ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς προσεκαλέσατο αὐτὰ λέγων· ἄφετε τὰ παιδιά ἔρχεσθαι πρὸς με καὶ μὴ κωλύετε αὐτά, τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. <sup>17</sup> ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὃς ἂν μὴ δέξηται τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς παιδίον, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς αὐτήν.

## 1. Infants

In this episode, people are bringing their babies to Jesus. Luke borrowed this story from Mark (Mk 10:13-16). But what is interesting is that Luke changes the word "little children" (*paidia*), which is in Mark, to "infants" (*brephē*). Later, Luke switches back to "little children". Why would Luke want to use the term "babies" or "infants"?

Perhaps to emphasize the helplessness or dependence that babies have. Babies are carried; they can't even walk as to little children.

## 2. Let the little children come

Jesus tells his disciples to "let the children come to him" so he could "touch them" (*haptēmai*), which for Luke refers to healing (5:13; 7:14). Apparently, people brought sick babies to Jesus.

Jesus' attitude toward children contrasts significantly with that of his day. In the first century a child was insignificant, weak member of society, and exemplified the "least" of society. The disciples are convinced that babies and toddlers are not important and that bringing children was a waste of Jesus' time. They were wrong!

Jesus "rebukes" his disciples for hindering people bring the children to him. This type of "rebuke" is the strongest type found in the Gospels. The same verb (*epitimaō*) is used by Jesus to rebuke demons (4:35), a fever (4:39), the wind (8:24), and in Mark it is used to rebuke demons.

### 3. The Kingdom belongs to *such as these*

Jesus did not say that the Kingdom belongs “to these” (to children *per se*) but to people “*such as these*.” Jesus is saying the Kingdom belongs to people who share some quality that babies and little children.

Babies and little children are examples of something, but what? What quality of babies and little children opens people to receive the Kingdom? Picture a baby in a mother’s arms? Or picture a little toddler walking beside her father with her small hand stretched up as high as it can go so she can lock onto his hand.

- Openness?
- Willingness to trust?
- Freedom from arrogance?
- Awareness of weakness and need?
- Dependence?
- Some other quality?
- Perhaps the metaphorical force of the image should be left open.

### 4. Receive the Kingdom of God as a little child

“Receiving the Kingdom of God as (*hōs*) a little child” can be interpreted two ways:

1. It could mean “accepting the Kingdom of God” in the same way that a child might receive it. We are to imitate the attitude of a child—happy, joyous, surprised, and elated. It refers to the character of the one receiving the Kingdom of God.
2. It could mean “accepting the Kingdom of God” in the same way you are to receive little children. The Kingdom is like a child. We are to accept the Kingdom that same what Jesus accepted little children—open arms, gladly, receiving the unexpected and the “least”. It refers to the character of the Kingdom of God.

### D. Conclusion and Reflections

1. What have you heard today? Write out one or two phrases that summarizes what you have heard.
2. How will you use this? In what circumstance or situations might you apply what you have learned today? If it is not used, it is not learned.
3. If you were to practice what you have learned today, what would be different in your relationship with yourself? With others? With God?