

# GOSPEL

# "FREEDOM"

Luke 18:9-14



- ◆ Ever Feel Unworthy?
- ◆ Ever Seek Approval?
- ◆ Ever Compare Yourself?

*"And He (Jesus) spoke this parable to those which **trusted in themselves that they were righteous**, and despised others."*

(Luke 18:9)

Bill Kirk

**Subject:** How a Gospel Centered Heart Brings Rest and Great Joy.

### **Introduction**

**Question:** Why did Jesus speak these words?

**Answer:** (V.9) "And He spoke this parable to those who (what?) **trusted in themselves**, and despised others."

**Question:** So what does it mean to trust in yourself?

**Question:** Why does someone who "trusted in himself" never feel rested?

**Question:** What's the answer (in the story) that produces a healthy Gospel centered heart today?

### **(Grasp The Setting In The Text)**

1. Two men went up to the Temple to pray (that's normal).
2. The devout Jew observed three prayer times a day – 9 a.m., 12 noon, 3 p.m.
3. People near Jerusalem loved to go to the Temple to pray – because the temple was the center of their worship.

**Question:** What kind of people went to pray in the Temple? (2 very different people)

#### **I. One Was The Pharisee (What's a Pharisee?)**

- ◆ The scribes and Pharisees had thousands of rules and regulations to keep – but it didn't make them sweet, humble, godly or joyful! (In fact)
  1. The Scribes were a class of scholars devoted to spelling out the principles set forth in the Law.
  2. The Pharisees were a group of laymen who separated from society to carry out all the regulations developed by the Scribes.

#### **(Remember)**

- ◆ In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, legalism became very repressive.
- ◆ The regulations were codified in the Mishnah (800 pages of rules).
- ◆ Soon after, commentaries emerged to explain the Mishnah (these were known as Talmuds).
- ◆ There were 12 printed volumes of the Jerusalem Talmud and 60 volumes of the Babylonian Talmud. (Thousands of oppressive rules):
  1. "Don't move a new lamp from one place to another on the Sabbath.
  2. "Don't put a saddle on a donkey on the Sabbath."
  3. Don't do this, don't wear that, don't step here, don't, don't, don't."

**Question:** What was the result of legalism? Two things:

1. Some people felt **unspiritual** (because they couldn't find the power to keep all the rules). The result was frustration (we're bad and others are good).
2. Other people felt **super spiritual** (because they had mental records of all the rules they were keeping). The result was arrogance (we're good and others bad).

### **And Jesus comes along and says**

- ◆ "Hey, wait just a minute here."
- ◆ "Unless your righteousness surpasses the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you'll never enter heaven (or enjoy your life on earth)."

**Question:** What kind of heart is in a Pharisee?

1. He has an **observatory** attitude. (V. 11)

"God, I thank you that I am not like that tax collector over there."

- ◆ I'm not like the extortionists, the unjust, the adulterers and not like that other guy in church over there.
- ◆ He tattletales on the Publican (to God) in the prayer meeting.

2. He has a **measuring** mindset (V. 11)

"I'm not like other people, no sir."

- ◆ He measures his spirituality by someone else's.
- ◆ He compares himself and looks pretty good.

3. He has a **boastful** spirit. (V. 12)

"I fast twice a week and I give tithes of all that I possess." (Wow)

- ◆ Fasting was mandatory for the Jewish people once a year on the Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 23:32)
- ◆ The Pharisees fasted twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays.
- ◆ Mondays and Thursdays were the market days when Jerusalem was full of country people.
- ◆ This gave the Pharisees the largest audience to advertise their spirituality.

- ◆ As for the tithe, the Levites were to receive a tithe of all a man's produce (Numbers 18:21; Deuteronomy 14:22).
- ◆ This Pharisee tithed on everything (not just produce) even things which there was no obligation to tithe.

**Question:** What's the discovery?

**Answer:** This Pharisee didn't really go to church to pray, he went to inform God how good he was, how much he deserved, and how many laws he kept.

**Question:** What's the legalistic Pharisee teach us?

1. Legalism is trusting in **my works** instead of Christ's work and sacrifice.
2. Legalism is obeying God, with the hope that **others** will see and **will be impressed** with my devotion. (Treadmill)
3. Legalism is trying to **gain God's favor** through my good behavior.
4. Legalism is feeling God **loves me more** when I obey Him and less when I don't. (See-saw)
5. Legalism is thinking **God is mad** when I don't fulfill my Christian duties with 100% perfection. (Unrealistic)
6. Legalism is believing that our works can make us right with God – which makes us **feel superior** to other people. (Dangerous)
7. Legalism is an assumption that my performance can be leveraged against the wrath **that my sin** deserves. (Never ending)

**Question:** What overcomes the lie of legalism and works righteousness?

**Answer:** Truth that sets us free:

1. "Therefore, by the deeds of the Law there shall **no flesh be justified in his sight**; for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20)
2. "Knowing that a man is **not justified** by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ." (Galatians 2:16)
3. "For by grace are you saved through faith; and that **not of yourselves**; it is the gift of God; **not of works**." (Ephesians 2:8)
4. "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, **not according to our works**." (II Timothy 1:9)

5. "But after the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, **not by works of righteousness which we have done**, but according to His mercy He saved us." (Titus 3:4)

### What's It All Mean? It Means...

1. I can't (**by my works**) build myself up in the eyes of God.
2. I can't (**by my deeds**) build up enough funds to pay my debt.
3. I can't (**by my behavior**) satisfy what only the Gospel can satisfy.

### Three Joy Stealing Feelings Live Inside of Legalistic People:

1. **Fear** – that you won't do enough good things for God to love you.
2. **Arrogance** – that you have done enough so God must love you.
3. **Failure** – that you've sinned too much and made too many mistakes.

**Question:** Why can't a legalistic person ever be joyful?

**Answer:** Because legalism is all about me, not about God.

- ◆ Legalism has to **defend** itself, **explain** itself, and **justify** itself.

### In fact

- ◆ Legalism makes you approval hungry and feeds the "disease to please".
- ◆ Legalism and moralism does the right things – but for the wrong reasons!

## II. The Second Praying Man Was A **Publican** (or a collector of tax revenues).

**Question:** How does he approach God in Verse 13?

1. "He stood **afar off** to the side." (Why?)
  - ◆ He was embarrassed by his sin (he felt unclean).
2. "He wouldn't **lift up his eyes**" (Why?)
  - ◆ Because he knew that God knew all about his sin.
3. "He **smote** his breast." (Why?)
  - ◆ Because he was grieved about his sin offending God.
4. "He **pleads** for mercy." (Why?)
  - ◆ Because he doesn't want what he really deserves.
5. "He calls himself a **sinner**." (Why?)
  - ◆ Because he realizes his good deeds can't pay the debt for his sin – and make him acceptable to God.

(In Other Words)

- ◆ This guy understands – that anything we experience in life that is better than hell – is sheer grace (and undeserved)!

**Question:** So why does Jesus teach us with a contrast of these two men in church?

**Answer:** To pound home three glorious truths:

1. The gospel first **deconstructs our hearts** before it reconstructs our hearts.
2. The gospel first teaches us we are **entitled to nothing**, but then it gives us everything.
3. The gospel is our only hope – because there is **nothing** we can do to earn God's favor or deserve His goodness.

**Question:** What's the bottom line take-a-way truth in this text (that changes us?)

**Answer:** It's pretty simple:

- ◆ There's nothing of value I can bring to God to deserve His salvation, mercy, justification or approval.
- ◆ Salvation is a gift, not a paycheck for being good.

**Question:** Why must each of us trust the Gospel alone? (And)

**Question:** Why must each of us be motivated by the Gospel?

**Answer:** Because without true Gospel motivation, the heart will default in two ways:

1. **Pride** (I have to **prove** myself – which results in self-justification.)
2. **Fear** (I have to **protect** myself – which results in self-preservation.)
  - ◆ Without Gospel motivation – we won't **succeed** well (It will go to our **head** – that's arrogance).
  - ◆ And, we won't **suffer** well (It will go to our heart – that's victimization and the blame game).

**Fact:** The Gospel corrects both the errors of:

- ◆ "I'm really great, aren't I?" (and) ◆ "I'm really rotten, aren't I"?
- ◆ A gospel-centered heart understands that we are **sinful** beyond belief yet **loved** beyond measure!!!
- ◆ A gospel-centered heart understands – it's the **object** of my faith, not the **level** of my faith. It's about Jesus (not me).
- ◆ A gospel centered heart understands that my **good** is not good enough (**to make God love me**) and my **bad** is not bad enough (**to make God hate me**).
- ◆ A gospel centered heart becomes less and less impressed with my **self** – and more and more impressed with **Jesus!**

## A Gospel Centered Heart

- ◆ Leads me to **deep humility** and **deep confidence** at the same time.
- ◆ It undermines both **swaggering** and **sniveling**.
- ◆ I cannot feel **superior** to anyone and yet I have **nothing to prove** to anyone.
- ◆ I do not think **more** of myself nor **less** of myself!

**(That's why Paul said in Colossians 1:23)**

"Continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from **the hope of the Gospel.**"

**(In Other Words)**

- ◆ Only the Gospel (or the work of Jesus) can bring rest to our hearts!!!
- ◆ It's only the Gospel that allows me to enjoy the journey!
- ◆ It's only the Gospel that frees me from trying to measure up.

**III. The Principle is Clear** (In V. 14)

"I tell you, this man (the Publican) went down to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted." (V. 14)

**Fact**: The Publican was justified (God heard his prayer that depended upon the grace of God).

**Fact**: The Pharisee left the temple with the same cold heart.

**(Why? Because...)**

1. "Everyone that exalts himself shall be abased."
2. "Everyone that humbles himself shall be exalted."

(Which means)

- ◆ The Pharisee missed **the boat** and **the bus** and **the train**:
  1. He told God about all the sins he didn't commit (thinking that God was now **obligated** to him on the basis of what he didn't do).
  2. He told God about all the good he did do (thinking that God was **impressed** by the observance of certain rites, rituals and ceremonies).
- ◆ **The Publican went home justified before God because...**
  1. He offered no self-proclaimed righteousness.
  2. He placed all his hope on the righteousness of another (Jesus).

**Question**: What's it all mean to us? It means...

1. I can stop **"pretending"**.
  - I can embrace my flaws and failures.
  - I don't have to be defensive when I'm corrected.

- I don't have to fake it, or hide, or blame others or pretend that I have it all together.
2. I can stop "**proving**" myself.
- You can rest in "**His**" resume – not yours.
  - You can overcome the stress of being driven to prove or promote yourself.
  - You don't have to dress or drive to be noticed, and you don't have to stretch the truth or exaggerate to "wow" anybody.

### (Why Not?)

- ◆ Because your concern is not "will anyone think less of me?"
- ◆ You can rest because the gospel reminds me of what God thinks of me!

### (In Other Words)

- ◆ Grace invites us to draw near to God – to be changed from the inside out.

### And this translates into joyful living (How?)

1. I don't take things so personally.
2. I'm not possessed over what other people think of me.
3. It's easier to forgive when I'm offended.
4. I don't have to control, manipulate or intimidate anybody to get my way.
5. I don't think other people are worse sinners than myself.

**Question:** So, what's our motivation to live free from destructive habits?

**Answer:** We don't obey to **be** free; we obey because we **are** free!

- ◆ It's God's kindness (at the cross) that leads us to repentance.
- ◆ I don't have to be holy, I want to be holy.
- ◆ I'm not forced, I'm invited to lay my heart open before God.

### "How Does A Gospel Centered (Non-Legalistic) Heart Affects Us?"

#### I. I Do Not Feel "**Entitled**"

- ◆ Because the reality is we all deserve death – yet God's grace has given us what we don't deserve!

(This truth produces a "**grateful**" spirit)

#### II. I Do Not Feel "**Exempt**"

- ◆ From difficulties and disappointments in life - because the cross proves there is nothing that God cannot ask of us.  
(This truth produces a "**contented**" spirit)

#### III. I Do Not Feel "**Elite**"

- ◆ Since we are sinners – only made holy by the work of another (Jesus!)



(This truth produces a "**humble**" spirit)

**Fact:** When you do not feel entitled, exempt or elite, you can enjoy your days because life is not all about you! (And)

**Fact:** I will only be content when I truly understand what I deserve. (And, what I deserve is wrath, but what I've been given is grace, welcome, and forgiveness.)

### **Altar Call**

(Since I don't have to **pretend**, **prove**, **promote** or **protect** my image – what is it that God wants to change in you today?)

1. Any idols or misplaced affections that you're trusting in?
2. Are you spiritually dry because you've been too busy for solitude with God?
3. Do you need to forgive anybody to live free from bitterness and anger?
4. Are you addicted to anything that's made you a slave to it? (Alcohol, tobacco, drugs, pornography, approval, affirmation, comparison, entitlement, insecurity?)
5. Is pride keeping you from asking God to "be merciful to me a sinner?"
6. Are you willing to give God permission to go deeper and change what needs to be changed?

### **(Two guys in the same church service)**

- ◆ One was concerned about what **other people** thought of him (**his appearance**).
- ◆ One was concerned about what **God** thought of him (**his condition**).

### **In Other Words**

- ◆ Image and ego are birthed out of pride! (The Pharisee)
- ◆ A healthy heart and a restful spirit is birthed out of humility! (The Publican)

### **Two Choices**

1. We can trust in our performance and good deeds (**The Law**) or,
2. We can trust in the Lord and His finished work. (**The Gospel**)

Nuf Sed!  
Bill Kirk