

PARABLES | The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Dylan Dawkins

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Introduction

Good morning! If you don't know me, my name is Dylan Dawkins and I'm the Student Pastor here at Grace Chapel. It's such an honor to be with you this morning.

Before we get into the sermon today, I want to read you a list of names to see if you can figure out what they all have in common: Women's Ministry Director, Carrie Elder. Missions Pastor, Myron Goodwin, and his wife Carol. Young Adults Ministry Leader, Caleb James. One of our Executive Pastors, David Green. One of our Advisory Elders, Dave Beuhring. And one of our Governing Elders, Chris Whitney.

These people all share several things in common. They all live in Williamson County. They're all good-looking people. They all love Jesus. They're all in leadership roles here at Grace Chapel. And the thing you might not know — since January, each of these leaders have taught the Word of God in our High School Ministry down at the Barn.

You might be asking yourself, "why the heck is the youth pastor here and where is Rob!?" Today, I have the pleasure of being with you here in the sanctuary while our Senior Pastor Rob Rogers adds his name to that list. I love that Rob and I get to do a Pastor swap today because while it might seem simple that all of these people have taught in our youth ministry, what it really represents is that our church, from the highest levels of leadership, believes in the next generation and is making room to pour into them as disciples of Jesus Christ.

We don't believe that our student ministry is just a fun place for teens to hang out and eat pizza while they wait to go to college and deconstruct everything they were ever taught about God. No, we believe in empowering and equipping the next generation to be disciples of Christ who follow Jesus, are being changed by Jesus, and go on mission with Jesus!

I believe that. Our pastors, elders, and ministry leaders believe that. And I'd invite you today to join us in that. Henry Blackaby once said, "The fuel for revival is prayer and testimony."¹ This generation of students is HUNGRY for revival. They are hungry to know the true and living God. And the youth ministry isn't just the future of the church...they are the church! We need them to rise up in faith, now! We need God's grace to fall on them now if we ever want to see revival happen. And I believe that your prayers could act as fuel for that flame.

So please, don't just be happy that our church's leadership believes in what God could do in the next generation. Join them in it. Please, pray for our students. Pray for this generation. Pray for God to have His way and bring a movement of repentance and transformation.

Blind to Pride

- During my freshman year in college, I was never good enough to play real college basketball, but I loved playing intramurals.

¹ Richard Blackaby. *Unlimiting God* (Multnomah Publishers, 2008)

- As a pretty tall guy, I can tell you that nothing felt as good as when a dude who's a foot shorter than me would try to drive into the lane for a lay-up and I'd just smack the ball into the stands.
 - It was a pride booster... "I'm better than you"
- We've all had times where we're driving somewhere with a friend or our spouse, and as we're talking about God knows what, a disagreement arises about something that doesn't *really* matter, but as the argument heats up, the person you're arguing with does a simple google search, and as they're standing in strong defense of whatever side they've taken, you begin to see the proverbial walls break down, as they read the facts they admit defeat. "Oh...I guess you're right"
 - And the feelings of satisfaction and superiority flood your mind as you bite your tongue to keep from saying, "of course I am."
 - But obviously you don't say that because you're a good Christian, right?
- In 2015, I first began attending Grace Chapel as a student of Narrow Gate. For 8 months I lived in the woods and studied the Bible and God changed my life. ...and after I graduated NG, I came on staff here as an intern in our MSM, and while I hate to admit it, I walked around with a spiritual arrogance.
 - When people in Bible studies would quote a Scripture out of context, I was quick to correct it and make sure they knew that I knew what that verse really meant.
 - When people would pray or preach, I would think to myself, "I wouldn't do it that way..."
 - As an intern at 20-years-old, I thought it would only be a matter of time until they asked me to lead the church because I was such a good and promising Christian.
 - I was quick to identify sin in other people, and quicker to excuse my own pitfalls and shortcomings.
- I exalted myself, I compared myself to others, and I was blind to the pride and self-obsessed mindset that I lived with.
 - Maybe some of you can relate...maybe you've become aware of that comparison thing in your own life...
 - Or... maybe you're saying, "I would never do that — this is our youth pastor!?" You're doing it right now!
 - *We live in a world of constant comparison!*

Why do humans in every culture compare themselves?

- Even with all of the benefits of social media, we don't need to look much farther than the horrifying correlation between social media use and the increases of depression and anxiety in adolescents to prove that we, as the human race, have a comparison problem.
 - But Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and GenZ aren't the problem...they just reveal what has been true about the human race for a long time.
 - 50 years ago, people had to *leave their house* to compare themselves to their neighbors, friends, family, coworkers, or magazines...
 - Now I can simply approve and celebrate my value or disapprove and destroy my self-worth with the lift of a finger.
 - This isn't just a twenty-first century problem...In every culture around the globe since time began you can find evidence of this.
- But *why* do we have this problem? Why do humans in every culture compare themselves?
 - Maybe because we're trained that way... school and work...**performance determines value...** but we always want more.
 - Maybe because its satisfying...it feels good to be the best...but that's only temporary...it fades.

- At the root of our need to compare, ***we are all desperately starving for approval...am I valuable? Am I enough? Do I measure up?***
 - We see this in our insecurities, in our unhappiness, and in the way we respond to criticism.
 - We often shift blame and work and strive to no end to answer one question: am I good enough?
 - We tend to base our answer to that question based upon how we feel about ourselves or how others feel about us.
 - Because of that, our relationships become focused around asking, “What you can do for me? What can I get from you? How can you make me happy and show me that my life is worth something?”
 - Or if people get in the way of our self-worth, we’re tempted to separate ourselves from them and cut them off completely.
 - We all desperately want approval from someone...a parent, boss, spouse, mentor, or in spite of someone...we all have someone that we want to validate us, and we often think if we can prove it to them... if we can prove it to ourselves...*then we’ll be happy.*
 - The reality is that what we are measuring is off target.
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**The goal of life isn’t to be the best version of yourself
or to measure up to other people’s expectations
it’s to become the kind of person that Jesus is.**

- Jesus understood that we all wrestle with this desire to measure up.

Two men go up into the temple to pray...

Luke 18:9-12

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’”

- Two men go up to the temple to pray...one a Pharisee – “separated one” (removed from the rest of culture). Religious and political leader of the day – *the good guy!*
 - God, I thank you! I don’t steal...that’s in the Bible...I don’t cheat on my wife...that’s in the Bible...I tithe...that’s in the Bible
 - I fast twice a week...that’s more than what was even required...I go above and beyond what is asked of me!
- God thank you that I’m not a bad guy. We do this with other Christians all the time
 - My church is the best church...
 - We do all the good stuff... we serve great breakfast... we do all the disciplines of a disciple.... we sign a discipleship covenant... we raise our hands in worship... our worship leader sounds like the guy from Need to Breathe...
 - God, I thank you that we aren’t like those outdated mainline denominations...we’re “non-denominational.”
 - In all seriousness, we can easily fall into the trap of comparison by thinking that we are better Christians because of what we do for God, or what church we are affiliated with.
 - That was the mindset of the Pharisee.

Luke 18:13-14a

¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.

- If the Pharisee was the good guy, this Tax collector was definitely the bad guy...the original audience would've seen this man as a traitor of Israel who got in bed with their oppressors.
 - He was probably very wealthy from all the money he collected...
 - And it's easy to imagine this tax collector carried with him a blend of shame for what he had done to his own people, and comfort in all that he had gained.
 - Yet even with all his wealth and security, he recognizes a need beyond himself.
 - God be merciful to me ...I've missed it ...I don't measure up to what you made me for...
 - ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.
- The issue wasn't that the Pharisee did a bunch of bad things... He didn't cheat on his wife or steal anything...he did what was right, and even when beyond what was required of him. He was a good man!
 - ***The problem wasn't his behavior...the problem was that he believed that he could be justified by his behavior.***
 - I'm here to tell you today that being a good person isn't the thing that will get you into Heaven...
 - **And comparing yourself to other people cannot justify you...the only way you could ever possibly be approved is if you can measure up to God Himself.**

Measuring up to God

Matthew 5:48

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- Anybody able to do that?
 - We wouldn't raise our hands in this moment, but we all act like it from time to time...we live our lives thinking that being a good person is the thing that will get us into heaven.
 - God, I've done everything right. I've been a good person. You owe me!
 - We attribute our worth to what we've done or haven't done, and Jesus says to us in this parable, "THAT'S THE WRONG MEASUREMENT!"
 - You cannot be justified by what you do, because God isn't nearly as interested in what you've done but in who you are...and in who you are becoming.

Luke 18:14

¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

- What kind of person are you?
 - Are you the kind of person who depends on their own righteousness as a way to show yourself as being good enough for God and other people?
 - Or do you hang on to the reality that you could never save yourself, no matter how hard you try?

- This is a battle I wrestle with on a regular basis.
- The Pharisee in me wants to self-justify my own actions and condemn the shortcomings of other people.
 - I often think I deserve to be exalted because of the good I've done, and I get bitter when I don't get what I think I'm entitled to.
 - It's usually somewhere in the height of my arrogance that I'm reminded of who it is I'm following.

Philippians 2:5-8

⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

- Jesus had every right to exalt Himself when He came to the earth, but He didn't. He humbled Himself.
 - He emptied himself completely – without pride or arrogance – so that we could be free from everything that gets in between us and the Father
 - And if we're willing to humble ourselves before Him like the tax collector did
 - ***If we're willing to quit relying on ourselves and start relying on the transformative power of the Gospel...***
 - ***We will experience the fullneww of what it means to be free.***

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

2 Cor. 5:17-18, 21

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself... ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

“The command *“Be ye perfect”* is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command... The process will be long and in parts very painful, but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.”²

~ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

- God's will for your life as a disciple of Christ is to become the kind of person Jesus is!
 - Jesus gave His life to transform yours... to restore you to who God made you to be.
 - To bring us back to what we had in the Garden of Eden...where we walk in the light of our Father's approval, completely unashamed!
- Our parable ends with Jesus declaring that this man went down to his house justified...
 - And for many of us, our understanding of the Gospel ends with this parable.
 - If I just humble myself and ask God for mercy, then I'll be justified.
 - Thank God that's true! But that isn't where it ends!
- Justification is just the beginning!

² C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity* (Harper Collins, Jun 2, 2009)

- Arthur W. Pink wrote a book called “*A Fourfold Salvation*”³ that highlighted the fact that at the cross, we are saved from the penalty of sin...but as we follow Jesus in His resurrection, we are saved from the power, presence, and pleasure of sin as well.
- There is great truth in the hymn, “*Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.*”⁴
 - When you see Him for who He really is and what He did for you, you can’t help but be humble.
 - Grace purges you of pride and superiority and humbles you.
 - Because we all want to know...am I enough? Am I worth anything? Do I have value? Can I prove it?
 - Listen to me... ***you were worth Jesus’ very life...that is enough.***
 - No matter what you’ve done or where you’ve been...no matter how badly you’ve missed the mark, God gave His life...His own Son...so that you might live in the light of His loving grace.

Rejecting pride and adopting humility

- *What would it look like* if we, as a church, as many individual members of the Body of Christ, made it a point to reject pride in ourselves and adopt the practice of humility?
 - This sermon doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t work hard, or be good at stuff, or achieve good things... we should!
 - And it *certainly* doesn’t mean that we should just tolerate our sin and live under some false form of hyper-grace...
 - But what it does mean is that our ability to measure up doesn’t determine our value in the Kingdom... Jesus does.
 - When we exalt ourselves, we worship us
 - But when we humble ourselves, we worship the one who truly deserves our worship.
 - When you go back to work...work for Him
 - When you achieve...achieve for Him
 - When you play a game of pick-up basketball, or drive down the interstate, or go to church, or spend time with your family...do it for Him...
 - Humble yourself...
 - You might be thinking, “okay, yes...I’m in! But how do I actually practice the discipline of humility?”

You don’t have to prove yourself

- Jesus had every right to exalt Himself...but He was humble and trusted His Father to take care of Him...
 - The good news is you don’t have to prove yourself!
- You might have come in here today feeling superior...
 - Maybe you’ve got a good job that pays well and you feel like you’re better than those around you because of the things you have...
 - maybe you’ve grown up in the south your whole life and you feel superior to all those heathens who live in blue states...

³ Arthur W. Pink. *A Fourfold Salvation* (Bottom of the Hill Publishing, 2011)

⁴ Miriam Huffman Rockness. *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus* (OxVision Books, Aug 14, 2018)

- Maybe you stayed here and stuck it out two years ago when the church split, and you feel like things are superior to the way they've used to be...
 - I've had to repent for the ways I've looked down on my brothers and sisters in Christ
 - *Did you come to the Temple feeling proud today?*
- Maybe you walked in today feeling inferior...that the people around you would never approve of you if they knew what you've done.
 - Maybe you feel like you can't walk into a church because of the ways you have failed to measure up in life...
- Wherever you are today, ***the gospel levels the playing field...we're all a bunch of tax collectors and pharisees.***
 - The question is not, are you good enough compared to the people around you... ***the question is "how do you respond to the holiness of God?"***

Luke 18:9-14

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed^[a] thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Philippians 2:3-11

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**What could God do in and through this church...in and through our city...
if we were willing to respond like that today?**

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss. Why do humans in every culture compare themselves? "Am I valuable? Am I enough? Do I measure up?"
2. Is this a recent development... or has it always been around. Read the first sentence of Luke 18:9.
3. Do you feel like you are a better Christian because of what you do for God? How you are obedient to Him in what you do?
4. What truth did the tax collector get right?
5. What does Jesus mean when He says, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect? Is that realistic?"
6. What kind of person are you? Do you have more Pharisee or Tax Collector active in you? Do you think you need to be exalted because of the good you've done? Or do you humble yourself and ask God for mercy?

NOTES