

# Luke Chapter 18 v 9 - 30

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[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome back. I hope that you've turned in your Bible to Luke in chapter 18. I'm going to read from that chapter beginning at verse 9.

Last week we looked at a parable of Jesus with the widow and the judge. Now another parable leading into some extraordinary meetings between Jesus and the people.

Luke chapter 18 verse 9. To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed, God, I thank you that I am not like other people, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week and I give a tenth of all I get. But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.

[ 1 : 23 ] For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled. Those who humble themselves will be exalted. People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them.

When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Truly, I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. A certain ruler asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Why do you call me good? Jesus answered. No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not murder. You shall not steal.

You shall not give false testimony. Honor your father and your mother. All these I have kept since I was a boy, he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, You still lack one thing.

[ 2 : 35 ] Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me. When he heard this, he became very sad because he was wealthy.

Jesus looked at him and said, How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. Indeed, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Those who heard this asked, Who then can be saved? Jesus replied, What is impossible with man is possible with God. Peter said to him, We have left all we had to follow you.

Truly I tell you, Jesus said to them, No one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and in the age to come eternal life.

Last Sunday, our Prime Minister announced a slight relaxing of the rules concerning social distancing. He encouraged people to return to work if they could.

[ 3 : 53 ] He gave us permission to meet up with one other friend or family member in a public space. And we are now able to go outside and spend a whole day outside.

As long as we want. As long as we return home at the end. However, the restriction of staying at least two metres apart still must be observed at all times, we are told.

And that's what many of us find most difficult about this lockdown. Not being able to give a grandchild or a cuddle or sit upon the knee and read them a story.

Not being able to give a friend an embrace or a hug. Not being able to give a grandchild or a hug.

Not being able to give a grandchild or a hug. This distancing of ourselves from those we love is certainly that which we miss the most.

And the hardest part of these present circumstances. One of the amazing things about the Christian message is that there's no social distancing between us and God, our Heavenly Father.

[ 5 : 02 ] The Gospel, the great message of Jesus Christ, is that all of us can come close to God. So close that we experience the warmth of His welcome and the comfort of His embrace.

So close that we become one with Him in a life of everlasting, unbreakable love. This is what Jesus had to say, describing something of this wonderful relationship in John 14.

My Father, that's God the Father, will love them. We will come to them and make our home with them. See the very reason why the Son of God, Jesus Christ, came into this world, took upon Himself a real human nature.

Lived, taught, died and rose again. Was for this one purpose. To bring us into a full relationship with God.

That relationship which we are all searching for and longing for. Usually in all the wrong places.

Here's what Paul has to say. Now in Christ Jesus, you who are far away have been brought near.

[ 6 : 17 ] Later on, Peter says this in one of his letters. Jesus suffered once for sin. To bring you to God. The message that Christians have today is the same message that has gone out throughout history.

The same message as the Apostle Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 5. When he tells the Christians, We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. Those who are sent with a message on his behalf.

As though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you, on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. In other words, be brought back into a right relationship with him.

That's God imploring through us. God pleading, as it were. That's what we as Christians have as a message to share in these days.

In Luke chapter 18 verses 9 onwards. Actually into chapter 19 as well. We find several people coming to Jesus. Thinking that they can enter into this wonderful relationship with God.

[ 7 : 24 ] Or seeking after this wonderful relationship with God. And what we find is that some of them are indeed accepted. And enter into that relationship with God. And others don't.

Well what makes a difference? Why do some fail where others succeed? And so this morning I'd like us to consider just three people. Or three groups of people.

Who come to Jesus. With the desire. It seems anyway. To know God. To be right with God. To be in a relationship with God.

And I hope that as we study these three people. Or groups of people. We'll learn something quite surprising. About God. And probably about ourselves.

Well the first group I've just made up of two people. And it's verses 9 to 14. We have a Pharisee. And a tax collector. They're characters in Jesus' parable.

[ 8 : 24 ] Remember he told a parable of a judge and a widow a little earlier. A parable is an everyday sort of event. Which has a very spiritual truth. A point as it were.

That's quite important to make. So in this parable we have these two people. And the point of this parable. Is something very surprising.

God welcomes the bad. But not the good. So that again. In case you thought I got it the wrong way around. God welcomes the bad. But not the good.

Now you may be shocked by that. You may find that very hard to understand. You may in fact find that completely unacceptable. Because we've been taught. And told. And made to think somehow. That God is only interested in good people. He only accepts people who are really, really, really, really good.

[ 9 : 21 ] However. Let me just clarify. My point as it were. As we look at this parable briefly. So here's this Pharisee. First of all. He's one of two men who go to the temple to pray.

And as he prays. This Pharisee tells us quite a good deal about himself. He's somebody who is very religious. He's somebody who did everything.

As far as he was concerned. That God wanted him to do. And so he tells God. And anybody else who cares to listen. That he's not like other people. He's much better than other people.

He's the goodest of all people. Because he doesn't steal. He's not a robber. He doesn't commit adultery. He's faithful to his wife. And he never does anybody any harm.

He never hurt anyone. He does more than that. He also gives up eating. At least twice a week. Or two meals a week. To show his devotion to God. And everything that he has or earns.

[10:22] He gives a tenth of it. Back to God. Then we have the tax collector. The tax collector is a rogue. He's somebody who worked for the occupying Roman army.

And empire. His work was to take money from his own country people. And give it to the hated Romans. And of course he was usually somebody who was corrupt.

Who liked to skim a little bit off the top. And keep money for himself. Which he would use on his own lifestyle. This was a man who made no effort to do the right thing. No effort to comply with God's laws.

And yet. Jesus tells us in verse 14. It is the tax collector who is justified by God. And not the Pharisee. Justified means to be accepted by God.

To be judged by God. And pardoned by God. And declared to be right with God. How can that be?

[11:26] How impossible. Anybody reading this just says. How can that possibly be? That this good man. And this bad man. Are treated so differently.

Well Jesus tells us. What is the quality. That God was looking for. What is the difference? What was the essential element. In the tax collector. Which wasn't in the Pharisee.

That made the difference with God. Verse 14. I tell you that this man. That's the tax collector.

Rather than the other. Went home justified. Before God. For all those who exalt themselves.

Will be humbled. Those who humble themselves. Will be exalted. God looked at the heart of these two men. As he looks at everybody's heart.

Yours and mine. He sees that one of them is extremely proud. One of them thinks that he is good enough. For God already to accept. For God already to accept. And that God should accept him.

[12:24] And God should be very pleased with him indeed. He's made a judgment about God. Instead of believing God's judgment about himself.

In several parts of the Bible. God makes a very sober judgment. Of all of humanity. Me and you included. Here's Paul in his letter to the Christians in Rome.

Quoting from one of the Psalms. And he writes this. There is no one righteous. Not even one. There is no one who understands.

There is no one who seeks God. All have turned away. They have together become worthless.

There is no one who does good. Not even one.

Their throats are open graves. Their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips.

Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood.

[13:23] Ruin and misery mount their ways. The way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes. But the tax collector saw himself as God saw him.

He saw himself as a sinner. He saw himself as someone who had nothing in him deserving of God's acceptance. He didn't have a list to bring as the Pharisee did.

Of all the good things he had done for God. So that God should be pleased with him and happy with him. He came as he was. He wouldn't even look up to heaven because he didn't feel worthy.

But he knew himself to be a sinner just as God said he was a sinner. But he knew that God was merciful. God have mercy.

He knew that he deserved God's judgment for his sin. He knew he deserved to be separated from God and judged and punished by God for his life and for his attitudes. And yet he knew that God was a forgiving God.

[14:27] A God who has provided full pardon for anyone who asks. You see nobody will come to God unless they know they need forgiveness.

So those that believe they're good can never enter life with God. Only those who are certain that they are bad. Humility and pride.

The second group of people that come to Jesus. We find in verses 15 and 17. And they are. Again here we have something very surprising.

Not only do we recognize in the parable that God welcomes the bad but not the good. But actually we read here in verses 15 and 17 that God welcomes the young but not the old.

Now be very careful to clarify that in a moment. By examining what happens and the conclusion Jesus brings. What is happening in this event is that people are bringing their children to Jesus.

[15:31] Their babies we're told here in the NIV. They're bringing them to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. That doesn't mean that they thought that he was a masseur.

Or that somehow his touch was special in that way. But really they're asking for God to bless them. For Jesus to bless their children. That means they're asking Jesus to bless them with protection.

And bless them with good health. And bless them with care. And ultimately that they may know God and live for him. It's something that Christians even do today.

Those who bring their children for baptism when they're young. They're bringing them in this same way. Asking for the blessing of God to be upon their children. That they might come to know him and trust in him.

However, there were people there who rebuked them and told them off. No, you mustn't bring your children to Jesus. The disciples in fact, surprisingly. Not the Pharisees or the ultra-religious.

[16:31] But the disciples. I'm sure that their intentions were very good. They thought perhaps, well Jesus must be tired. He's had a long day. He doesn't really need this sort of extra stress.

Or they thought perhaps he's just too busy dealing with, you know, real problems of people's health and healing and so on. It may just be they thought that Jesus wasn't interested in children.

Children can't exercise belief in Jesus or faith in him. So really there's no point in them coming or being brought. However, Jesus invites the parents and the children to come and receive his blessing.

Let the children come to me, he says. It's obvious that he does care about the children, the babies. It's obvious that he not only cares about them.

But also, he points out through the example of these children who are brought to him, a very important reality and truth. That only people with a childlike spirit, a childlike attitude, as it were, can ever enter into God's kingdom and enjoy a life with him.

[17:41] Truly, verse 17, truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. Why is childlikeness necessary to come to God?

Why does Jesus exalt childlikeness? Surely we're all encouraged to grow up and act our age and not to be so childish. Trouble is, you see, as we get older, we become more cynical.

As we get older, we become more opinionated. And basically, we become much more self-confident in ourselves. But a young child is open-minded.

A young child is trusting. A young child is willing to learn. See, like the Pharisee before, most adults will not come to God on his terms as a sinner in need of God's mercy.

See, we know better than God, don't we? We've had life experience. We've felt and learnt in the hard school of life.

[18:50] We're wise now that we're older. And we've made up our minds about ourselves and about God. And our conclusion is this.

We don't believe in this God of Jesus Christ. If we did believe in a God, well, he wouldn't be like this. He'd be a God who suits us. He'd be a God who we've created to fit in with our lifestyle and our attitudes and our way of doing things.

See, again, the reality is this. It's not that God rejects anyone on the basis of their age. Or any other standing, as it were, in life, whether they be intellect or whether that be financial ability or disability or anything.

It's just that we reject him as he really is because we think we are much cleverer than God. Unless you become like a little child, says Jesus.

Willing to accept me on my terms. Willing to put aside your own prejudices and your own cleverness.

[19:58] You're never going to come. You're never going to want me. You're never going to enter into a life of peace. Then thirdly, we have one more person.

And this person we've probably heard about and read about before. He's the rich ruler. Elsewhere he appears in the other gospels as a rich, young ruler. And here we learn something quite surprising as well.

Not only that God welcomes the bad, but not the good. Not only that God welcomes the young, but not the old. But also that God welcomes the poor, but not the rich. Here's a rich man.

A rich man of influence as well. A ruler. Somebody of him standing in the town. Somebody who's looked up to. Somebody who people tug their forelock to and calls sir.

And he comes to Jesus with a question. What must I do to inherit eternal life? He's after the same thing as the others are. As the parents were for their children. As the Pharisee and the tax collector were.

[21:01] He's after the same thing. A life-giving relationship with God. In this life and in the life to come. And as we read through.

And as he talks to Jesus. We realise that he's someone again. Who considers himself to be a good person. Like the Pharisee. He declares he's kept all these commandments.

Whether it be not to commit adultery. Or murder or steal. And so on. I've done it since I was a young man. I've always been scrupulous and careful. I'm a good boy.

Like little Jack Horner in the corner. Oh what a good boy am I. Jesus says to him. You lack something. Yes you live this life.

So you claim to be good. I'm not going to quarrel with you. Or argue with you. If you think you're good. But let me tell you this. You're missing something. Something very very important. Jesus tells him to give his money away.

[ 22 : 03 ] To the poor. And to follow him. It may seem that Jesus' request or command to this man. To give away his money. Is really almost saying.

Well you've done these things. But you need to do some more good things. You've kept the law. Yes that's good. But you need to give money away to charity. You need to be caring and loving. If you did those things.

As well as the other things. Then of course you'd get into heaven. Then of course you'd be accepted. There's some good things you can do. To make you right with God.

No Jesus isn't saying that at all. He isn't saying. Just do more good things. Or this type of good thing. He tells us very clearly. That's not what he means. It's not his point.

Rather the point is this. As he says in verse 24. How hard it is for the rich. To enter the kingdom of God. Indeed it's easier for a camel. To go through the eye of a needle. Than for someone who's rich.

[ 22 : 57 ] To enter the kingdom of God. In other words it's impossible. Jesus took the smallest thing. That they would know. A needle with a little hole in it. And the largest animal. That would have been around at the time.

Weren't any elephants and giraffes. There would have been a camel. And that's pretty big. It's impossible. You see when a person loves their wealth.

More than life with God. It's impossible for them to come to God. Do you remember how Jesus taught about this. Earlier on in Luke chapter 16. Where he spoke and said this.

You cannot serve both God and money. In other words you cannot love both God and money. You cannot live for God and money. You've got to choose. There's got to be a choice. And here this young man is presented with a choice.

Before Jesus. Jesus says yes. If you put money second in your life. If you put God first in your life. Above this money. Then you can enter into the kingdom of God.

[ 23 : 58 ] And the man had a choice. And he didn't want to leave his money. He loved money more than he loved God. Now that may not sound all that important.

But think about it in this way. He's reluctant to part with his money. Or his reluctance to part with his money. Shows that he values God less than money.

God you're not as important as my possessions. You're not as important. You're not as good.

You're not as enjoyable. You're not so great after all. But having money and riches. And a car and a house.

And all these things. That's much better than having you. You see how bad it is. You see how devastating it is. He completely undervalues God. Who he is.

And what it means to have a relationship with him. Jesus said to him. Come give your money to the poor. And you'll have treasure in heaven. Spiritual treasure. Real treasure to come.

[ 24 : 53 ] Now it's not easier necessarily for a poor person. To come to God. It's just that anyone.

Who wants to come to God. Must want God more than anything else. They must have that desire for God.

More than anything else. They must have that desire for God. More than self-esteem. And feeling good about yourself. And thinking that you are better than others.

As the Pharisee did. It must be that you want God more. Than thinking yourself clever. And wiser than God. And exalting your own intellect.

And your own beliefs. Above what God has said. It must mean that you want God more. Than anything in this world can offer. And let's be honest.

[ 25 : 52 ] What can this world offer? It can only offer things that rust. And decay. And are eaten by moths. And are stolen. We've got to see ourselves as God sees us.

As sinners. In need of forgiveness. As children. In need of understanding. As poor. In need of real.

Treasure. That God knows what's best for us. And God has what's best for us. We need our eyes opening. That's why when Jesus says to the disciples.

It's impossible for a person. A man. To save themselves. Or make themselves see these things. Or to recognise their need. It must be God who does it. For God it's possible.

He's telling us that it's the gift of God. To transform our thinking about ourselves. And about Jesus. God has to turn on the light.

[ 26 : 59 ] In our dim minds. God has to wake us up. From the slumber. That we're in. God has to raise us.

To life from the dead. The disciples here. The disciples say. Well we've left all these things. To follow you. We have given them up. We've put you first. Lord Jesus.

In our lives. And what Jesus says to them. Is a wonderful assurance. A wonderful. A wonderful. A confidence for them. He says.

Whoever has given up. When he says left home. He doesn't mean you have to actually leave your home. But he means given up. Put in second place. Home. Or wife. Or brothers. Or sisters. Or parents. Or children. For the sake of the kingdom of God.

For the sake of knowing God. And being in his kingdom. Will. None of these people. Will fail to receive. Many times as much. In this life. And in the age to come. Eternal life. The riches of God.

[ 27 : 55 ] Far outweigh anything in this world. Any relationship. Any possession. At any position. Any degree. Or doctrines.

See when God comes. And shows us. Really who we are. And who he is. Then we won't let anything.

Stand in the way. Of coming to God. And receiving his love. And forgiveness. And life. We won't let anybody else. Stand in the way. We will come.

We must come. We can't help but come. Just like that. That tax collector. Whose eyes were open. To see. He was a sinner before God. And yet with God.

There was forgiveness. Dear friends. God has removed. The social distancing rules. And says.

[ 28 : 49 ] Come to me. Jesus says. Come to me. You who are weary. And heavy laden. With the things of life. And fed up. With all that the world. Seems to offer. Which is so disappointing.

Come to me. But we've got to come. On God's terms. We can't come. With a sense of.

Haughtiness. And arrogance. Saying God. You should accept me.

Because I'm so good. We cannot come. And say God. I'll come. But only if you are. As I want you to be. And adapt to my way of thinking. Or God. I want to come. But really. Can you take second place.

In my life. To all the things. That I've already fallen in love with. And they're so important to me. God's terms are very simple. We must come. With repentance.

Turning away from our sin. We must come with faith. In Jesus. Who is the way. The truth. And life. Let me urge you. And encourage you. To come to God. And he will not turn you away.

[ 29 : 46 ] But receive you. And welcome you. In his embrace. We're going to sing a wonderful. Great.

Old hymn. Rock of ages. Cleft for me. Let me hide myself. In thee. It opens up. And explains. Something of what it means. To come with that same attitude. That completely lays everything aside. And presses on. For God himself. May the Lord bless you.

And be with you this week. Watch over and keep you. May your heart be drawn to him. More and more. Day by day. Remember to pray for one another. Pray for our nation. And our world.

For friends in the church. Remember to care for one another. And love one another. This is. What it means. To be a Christian. Goodbye.